The Premier Magazine of Insider News, Advance Previews and Accurate Reviews

INTELLIGENT GAMER'S

FUSION™

Nintendo 64 • Saturn • PlayStation • M2 • Arcade • PC • Internet

F-1

Psygnosis' Formula One Leads the Pack of 1996 Racing Sims

May 1996
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DECKER PUBLICATIONS

Konami's President Speaks Out About the Company's Upcoming **32-Bit Games**

FIRST LOOKS:

- Sega's 1996 Lineup
- Jane's Longbow
- Resident Evil
- NBA Shoot Out
- Ultimate MK3
- Olympic Games
- X-Men: COTA

DON'T JUST DODGE ROCKETS,

DANCE WITH THEM,

SING A SONG TO THEM,

THEN **TATTOO**

YOUR

ON THEIR

NICKEL PLA

Microsoft

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You play games like a natural born gamer.
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INITIALS

TED
SKULLS.

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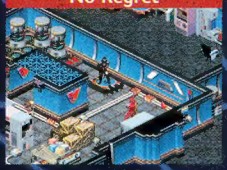
Previews

48 • Olympic Games

70 • Crusader: No Regret



54 • Buster Brothers Collection

72 • Beyond the Beyond

56 • Afterlife

74 • Ultimate MK3

60 • Jane's Longbow

76 • Pandora Directive

66 • Formula One Racing

Reviews

78 • NBA Shootout

85 • X-Men: COTA

80 • VR Soccer '96

85 • Magic Carpet

82 • Ripper

86 • Worms

83 • Earthworm Jim II

86 • Baku-Baku

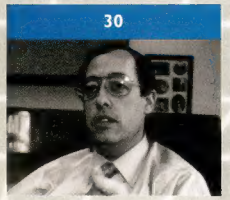
84 • Resident Evil

Features

22

SEGA attacks on multiple fronts

While the rest of the world is preparing quietly for May's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E³) in Los Angeles, Sega of America conducts a multi-city pre-E³ tour and shows anxious *IG* editors its latest wares...plus exclusive reports on Bug Too! Nights and Three Dirty Dwarves.


30

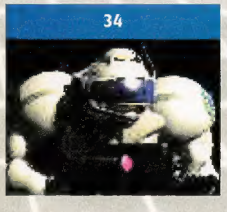
Konami's president speaks:

Andrew Donchak talks to *IG's FUSION* about the company's new outlook, its line of successful 32-Bit games and big surprises coming at E³...

33

special preview: Konami's **Midnight Run**

***IG* editors were invited to sit down for an extended session with Konami's latest fantasy racing simulation. Although they were primed to see any little flaw that might appear, they came away wanting more...**


34

Unknown but not unheard of

BlueSky Software, responsible for some of Sega's biggest Genesis titles, has moved on to greener pastures. New 32-Bit rendered games are previewed.

38

Ultima's Global Village

A thorough look at Origin's Ultima Online multiplayer RPG world.

Exciting news from the publishers of Intelligent Gamer's FUSION.

Starting next month Intelligent Gamer will debut on the newsstands as the evolution of IG's FUSION. See page 98 for more on this exciting news...

Departments

6 • Editorial

Editor Jer Horwitz announces the dawn of a new era for *IG's FUSION*.

8 • Communications

Actual reader mail from actual readers, and we even actually read what they say.

12 • News

Sega licenses Model 2, Announces net plans; Sega gets UMK3 exclusivity window; VF3 and War Gods excite ACME crowds in Florida; Microsoft, Namco and NEC push 3-D gaming, Time Warner Interactive goes to WMS; an extended *IG* Overheard section and improved Hot Top Tens.

40 • Japan Today

From Shinjuku, Tokyo, Akira Kishimoto witnesses Japan's AOU Arcade Show and CSG Game Console Show.

47 • New Releases

LOBO Lists the most exciting games on the horizon.

88 • Online

The "global village" has arrived. Talk for free with gamers around the world using Internet Relay Chat.

92 • IG Queries

And if reading actual mail wasn't enough, here we actually try to answer readers' questions. Qué fortunato!

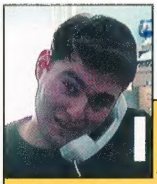
94 • Gaming in Perspective

Coachin' Arnie Katz talks about his favorite thing in the world: baseball simulations.

96 • Buzz Word

Christopher Drost goes medieval on this month's Buzz Word, the often dreaded but seldom understood "Full-Motion Video."

On the cover: Psygnosis' Formula One Racing for the PlayStation is currently at the forefront of a new flock of hot and odd racing games available in home and arcade formats this year. Even Konami's pricey Speed King will be appearing on the PlayStation in late 1996–are you ready for a second generation of home racing titles?



the New ERA awaits

I'd like to use our editorial space this month to make a quick statement to our readers about the future of this magazine, as we're about to make a very large-scale transition to a new name, an improved design, and for several of our editors, new homes. Your readership has helped us to grow every month, and we owe you a progress update on where things stand with *Intelligent Gamer*.

The last few months have been great fun for the staff of *IG's FUSION*, but they haven't passed without the hard work and dedication of some key people who might otherwise never get the recognition they deserve. Michael Stassus, one of Sendai's wise Art Directors, took on an immense challenge when he agreed to help us transform—in only three weeks—*Intelligent Gamer's* online format into a print magazine, and what you see in *IG's FUSION's* format today is largely a product of his hands and eyes slaving away on a PowerMac into the wee hours of many nights. Rey Ledda and John Ritter came on board with our second issue, helping to evolve our art design concepts and handle the mass of information that rushes into our editorial offices each month, and I owe a personal debt of gratitude to them, a number of hard-working copy (Jennifer Whitesides, Jo-El Damen, Dan Peluso, Jim Caswell) and content editors (esp. Mike Stokes) and the entire art team (Jim Cordano, Jason Hinman, Donna O'Hara, Juli McMeekin) at Sendai, who have taken time out of their busy schedules to help make our magazine better.

My deepest feelings, however, are reserved for three people who have really made *IG's FUSION* what it is today. You'll note that you never see either Joe Funk, Sendai's Editorial Director, or Steve Harris, Sendai's owner, asking for credit for the jobs they do, but they deserve it: Without Joe's attention and guidance, it would be impossible to assemble this magazine each month; without Steve's interest and backing, *Intelligent Gamer* would never have broken through from the electronic world to the print world. We cannot thank them enough for giving us the tools and backing to bring our vision to news stands. The third and final person on my list of thanks is Dean Hager, who as *IG's* Managing Editor has the challenging job of dealing with all of the minute details that keep *IG* moving from month to month, and he has really been an anchor for all of the other hard-working editors and writers on *Intelligent Gamer's* staff roster. Thank you, sincerely, to every one who has helped to get us to this point today.

Now, having said that, here's how we're going to be changing in the next few months. Next issue, you'll witness the replacement of *IG's FUSION* with the launch of an all-new *Intelligent Gamer* magazine, combining the same high quality of information and reviews, an improved format, and even stronger editorial backing from the *IG* crew. We've been fine-tuning our editorial ranks over the last few months, seeing what's been working and what hasn't, and we're certain that our forthcoming team is going to be ready for the work ahead.

In addition, a few of us will be packing our bags for a big move to Lombard, Illinois—three of *IG's* editors will be moving into our new editorial offices and homes near Chicago, which (as you might guess) is tremendously exciting for all involved. (Lee, John and I are thinking of splitting an SFA2 arcade board three ways...can we really wait until late '96 to play it at home?) While it might not seem important to you right now, our move to Lombard will mean that we'll have increased quality control over the contents of the new *Intelligent Gamer*, and that's a major issue for all three of us as we're getting our bags and boxes packed up.

So, sit back, dig in to this new and final issue of *IG's FUSION*, and get ready for the premiere of *Intelligent Gamer* magazine next month. We're looking forward to your comments as we begin our transition to the next phase of the *Intelligent Gamer* vision.

Jer Horwitz, Editor-in-Chief

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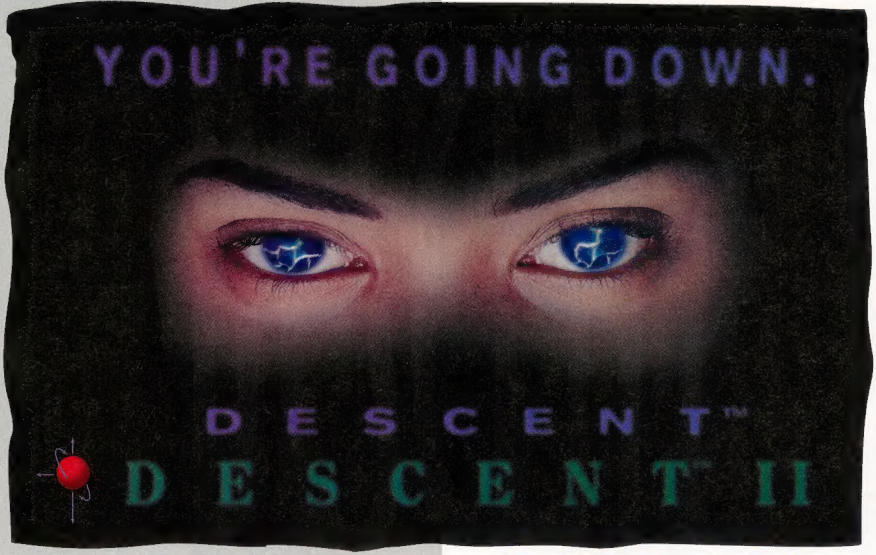


DESCENT™
New For PlayStation!™

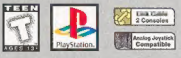
What you've been waiting for.
True 360° movement in 3D.
30 gut-wrenching levels.
Robot enemies that learn your moves.
Descent is now on PlayStation.™
And you're going down.

Descent is the only game with 30 gut-churning levels of true 360-degree 3D madness, including 5 new anarchy levels.

"Practically the definition of cool!"
Game Players

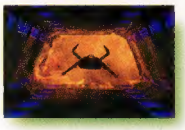
"Can you say Vertigo?"
Next Generation

New special effects found only on PlayStation™ features the alternative rock of Type O Negative and "Ogre" of Skinny Puppy.



DESCENT™ II
New For PC!

Introducing Descent II.
10 new weapons, 30 new levels.
Toggle floodlights, afterburner speed doubler. Twice the 360-degree insanity.
You're going down.
Again.



30 new mind twisting levels • 10 new destructive weapons systems including the fully automatic Gauss Cannon • Pure 360-degree madness!

"Sequel of the year!"
Computer Game Review

New "guidebot" ally leads you through levels. • Toggle beam floodlights that turn on and off. • Afterburner that doubles your speed.

Interplay™
BY GAMERS. FOR GAMERS.™

Developed by Parallax Software

Download the 3-level Descent II demo at http://www.interplay.com

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Gameplay and graphics unite

Dear FUSION,
Somehow I enjoy my Neo•Geo cart games more than their advanced PS counterparts. I feel the games have more personality. I get bored of the 3-D rendered "look," and want just gameplay.

Sabino Jauregui
Hialeah, FL

[Ed. Getting the obvious point out of the way first, there's no rule that "games with great graphics cannot have great gameplay," or vice-versa, which is a point *IG's FUSION* had to make to one developer who complained that Johnny Bazookatone (*IGF* rating: B+) isn't a better game than his current favorite, Street Fighter Alpha (*IGF* rating: B). While we agreed that SFA is a really fun game, we had to point out that Johnny B's significantly more impressive aesthetics (B+ and A-, compared with C+ and B-) raised its overall grade while SF Alpha's great gameplay and lasting power—the reason he's still playing SFA—were the reason we could forgive the so-so art and sound work and keep playing the game for weeks. Whereas many magazines' rating systems immediately go off the charts for any new game with one neat feature, *IGF* is content to rate each portion of a game's content fairly and let the final grade fall where it does: Even Capcom noticed how bland SFA's aesthetics were, and that's why SFA2 (coming this summer) is so much of an audio-visual improvement. On the subject of getting "just gameplay," if you like fighting games, the Neo is a great machine, but bear in mind that the best N•G fighters will be coming to the Saturn and PS quite soon now...]

Magazine production 101

Dear FUSION,
What kind of classes do you take to get a job with a magazine?

Scott Brood
Layton, UT

[Ed. That depends on the magazine. Given the state of the games media nowadays, some college-level English and journalism courses might be in order, but you can take multiple routes to getting into the business depending on your specific interests. If you're looking to get involved in art, gaming photography or magazine layout, appropriate classes in illustration, photo composition and graphic design would be of great benefit. If you're thinking of writing about games, experience in playing and observing games always helps as there are no classes (yet) in completing RPGs and mastering Fighting games. Writing about coding, game hardware and marketing is a lot easier for people with experience in computer programming, electronic engineering and economics/ business, respectively.]

▲ Why did SFA only rate a B? The 13 characters looked nice, but the backgrounds were few in number and bland in design, not to mention the so-so music. Even Capcom knew that it wasn't the "best SF ever." Alpha 2 has five neat new characters, entirely redone background artwork, and even better gameplay.

Soul Edge psych-out

Dear FUSION,
I am in hell. Today, I went to the local Putt-Putt Golf and Games to join the "Token Savers" club. Anyway, I look to my left, and I notice...a new machine. Could it be? No...it can't be...but it is! Soul Edge had been delivered this morning! I turned to the arcade owner, and in the middle of all of my praises and exaltations to them for getting such a godly game, he interrupts me: "We have Soul Edge, but it doesn't work. They shipped us the cabinet, but the machine is missing its guts." It should be fixed within a week. AAAARRRRRGGGGG!

Greg Lemon
Norfolk, VA

[Ed. It could have been worse—you could have just put your cash down on a non-refundable deposit for the Jaguar VR goggles, or bought stock in a video game maker prior to a Dan Dorfman report on CNBC. Life does get tough.]

▲ "Hey, that's what you get for trying to join the Token Saver's club, buddy!"

▲ Destruction Derby (PS version shown) for the Saturn will feature network play.

Free online gaming a reality?

Dear FUSION,
Network gameplay has become a big hit over the past few years on personal computers; in particular, network or modem gaming that does not require a connection to some central hub and, in turn, does not require a monthly fee. I feel that the console market has an untapped opportunity in network/modem games. What companies are looking to break into this new area and what are their products/ideas? I know of the X-Band network but feel that it can't truly revolutionize the console gaming industry because of the monthly fee.

Richard Wifall
Albuquerque, NM

[Ed. Several companies have been exploring networking and modem opportunities: X-Band has been doing a terrific job considering that they don't have Microsoft-league money to finance their endeavors, and Sony has taken the early lead in the console networking game by releasing several wonderful link-up games for the PlayStation. Sega has been delaying their announcements on networking to date, but they're set to announce some sort of plan with the impending release of WipeOut and Destruction Derby (ironic, eh?) for the Saturn, both of which have network code built in. Their Saturn Internet modem will be released in Japan in several months, and their American modem will follow shortly afterward, with a comprehensive plan for both PC and home game downloads to be put in motion sometime soon. Nintendo has been negotiating with Netscape over Japanese and American N64 modem link-up abilities to work with their N64 Disk Drive, leaving only Matsushita's networking and modem plans in question for now...]

Open All Night.
No Quarters Needed.

Williams Williams Entertainment Inc.

PlayStation

Super NES® and GENESIS™ versions coming this summer.

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Communications

One industry united strong?

Dear FUSION,
What would the gaming world be like if Matsushita is successful in its move to unite the industry under one standard? Cheaper software? Cheaper game systems? A possible high-tech DVD standard built into every player? Would it end up like the VCR wars—one standard, companies cooperate on the standard platform, compete for the software, or would it ignite a constant battle for new standards like on the PCs—new processors, bus structures, sounds cards, etc?

Leo B. McArdle
Colorado Springs, CO

[Ed. Assuming your hypothetical situation to be true, and at the moment, that does require more than a slight leap of faith, the major changes would depend on the infinite number of specific situations that would arise following Matsushita's conquest: Would the industry be united under Matsushita-branded machines, or would there be multiple corporations competing over selling M2-compatible hardware? If everyone hypothetically agreed on the core chipset, which seems all but impossible given the competitive nature of the marketplace today, it would only be so many months or years before someone else introduced a cheaper or more powerful machine which would erode the standard's market share. (Think NES at roughly 90 percent of the eight-Bit market and Sega and Atari sharing the rest... where did that go?)]

▲ **Could these chips dominate the marketplace one day? If Matsushita's plans work out, M2'll be in PCs, DVDs and consoles...**

Revenge of the Nerd

Dear FUSION,
I always thought that video games were refuges for pointy-headed dorks who had no girlfriends and a whole lot of extra time on Friday and Saturday nights; and though I would occasionally play Madden with my roommates, the rest of it was beneath me. This, of course, was before I got accepted into law school, lost my girlfriend and broke my leg (all within the same week). Video games became a refuge, and I, with brand-new pocket protector in hand, joined the land of pointy-headed dorks with no girlfriends and plenty of time on Friday and Saturday nights. I became interested in the whole undiscovered world of gaming, and that interest (along with free Internet access from school) lead me to IG Online. Your place is cool; there is lots of interesting bric-a-brac all over the place and the layout seems to be a huge mess; in fact it was so like my apartment I felt right at home instantly.

Then, one day I was on AOL, talking with my fellow "enthusiasts" (much better term than pointy-headed dork, eh?) when I got into a discussion about good places to go on the Web with this guy who seemed cool. As I suspected, the guy did not have a girlfriend, but when I inquired "why?" I found that it was because he was a she! What a shock, a woman who liked video games. I had to meet her. We met for coffee and went out a couple of times. While I can't tell you that we got married and lived happily ever after, I can tell you that I got laid consistently for several months, which was a definite plus, and it was all thanks to video games—and, in no small part, to your Web site. Just wanted to say thanks. If you ever need to boost your circulation, you could now legally hold yourself out to be the magazine that gets people laid. I'd offer my testimonial!

Ryan Nelson
Cincinnati, OH

[Ed. (scribbling note to Art Department...) remove "Nintendo 64 • Saturn • PlayStation..." and replace with...]

That's not a bad idea...

Dear FUSION,
Any cute chicks working there? (just kidding!)

Dickson Lee
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada

[Ed. (crossing fingers) Send your resumés to IG's FUSION, 1920 Highland Avenue...]

Waiting for CD-ROM pack-ins

Dear FUSION,
Have you guys ever thought of doing a CD-ROM magazine? Subscribers could get discs each month with the same material, but formatted for their systems, such as Saturn, PS or PC. Of course, it is kind of a problem for cartridge systems, such as Nintendo 64...

David Liu
Mountain View, CA

[Ed. After hearing from Sega about the nightmarish time they've had with producing another magazine's "special" and now delayed cover CD-ROM, we think we'll hold off until we can get some truly quality content for a sampler CD.]

You're too kind, Ronald.

Dear FUSION,
I think your magazine is a refreshing face. After reading magazines with total bias, I really appreciate a mag like this. Keep up all of your good work.

Ronald R. Coley
Chicago, IL

[Ed. The pleasure is all ours. Thank you for reading.]

Send your comments, concepts and theories to:
IG's FUSION Communications
by e-mail at ***iglee@aol.com****,*
subject line: Communications
or *by mail at*
1920 Highland Avenue
Suite 222, Lombard, IL 60148

Corrections

Sharp readers no doubt noticed a virtual cornucopia of typographical errors scattered throughout the last two issues of IG's FUSION, and though we were thinking of holding a contest to see which reader could come closest to correctly counting the glitches, we decided to hold off on using that idea until we inadvertently run a page full of profane ramblings in place of a game review. In short form, here's a list of key corrections to the last two issues of FUSION.

Issue 8: *Olaf Olafsson was the president of Sony Interactive Entertainment not Sony Interactive Studios; Boss Game Studios: Squaresoft, Bullet-Proof and Nintendo have offices near Boss—T*HQ does not; Seth Mendelsohn is quick to point out his role in helping to design parts of the Sega Genesis game Aladdin, which was inadvertently left out of his many credits; Thriller Instincts: The name of Nintendo's spokesman was inadvertently left out; FUSION spoke with Scott Pelland; Skeleton Warriors' overall score was a B-; Need for Speed and Toshinden 2 were both PlayStation versions; Toshinden 2 has been released in Japan already and will be released in the United States in May; A picture of Gaia was misidentified as Chaos, who appears in another picture within the review; MK2 for the Saturn was developed by Probe; Gaming in Perspective: A picture of Toshinden 2 was mistakenly identified as Ki.*

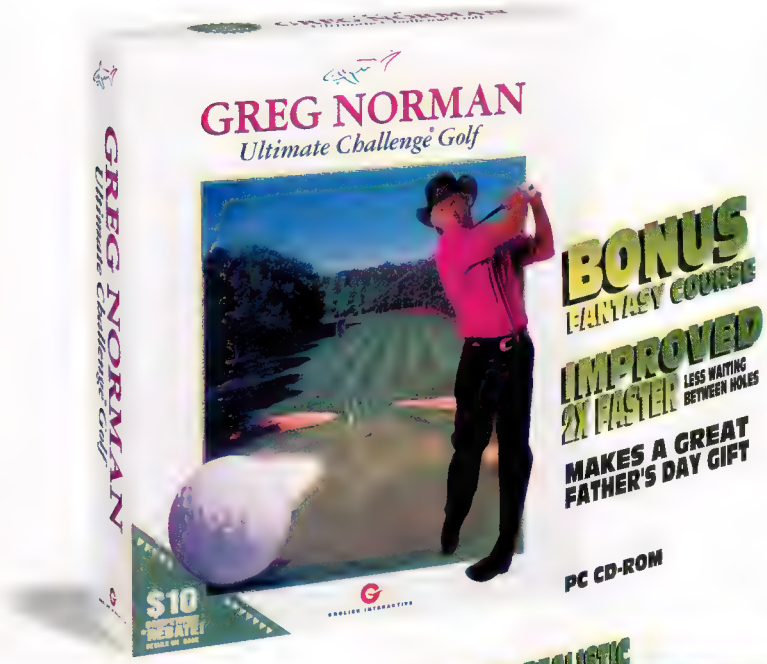
Issue 9: *Japan Today: Final Fantasy VII is scheduled to appear on the PlayStation; plans for FF8 have not been made public yet; NBA Live '96: Six CD-ROMs? Not quite. NBA Live comes on a single CD-ROM; Our deepest apologies to Dave Gatchel and John Sell, whose names were captioned incorrectly right before issue nine went to print.; Panzer Dragoon Zwei is scheduled for a second quarter '96 release; Sega's Web site is http://www.segaoa.com. Iron Rain is to be released for the Saturn.; Gearheads' entire grading box was listed incorrectly: the overall score was to be a B+. BattleSphere for the Jaguar will be a cartridge game.*

We apologize for the typographical errors.

GOLF REAL!

"Of the dozens of computer golf games we've played, the *'Greg Norman Ultimate Challenge'* Golf CD is by far the most realistic."

–GOLF MAGAZINE, March '96



Coming in May, 1996

Greg Norman Ultimate Challenge® Golf uses your own swing profiles and course management strategies to create the most realistic golf game ever. Improved graphics, sounds, and animation now make Greg Norman Ultimate Challenge Golf even better. There is even a new BONUS Fantasy Course with 18 additional holes of the most challenging golf imaginable. To Golf Real, See your local retailer or call 1-800-336-3686

GROLIER INTERACTIVE
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"Golf Real" by selecting your own playing strengths at the start of the game, or...

...use the Swing Meter for traditional "arcade" style of play.

News

▲ The new-and-improved Saturn

Sega lowers Saturn price

Announces technology strategies

Slowing Euro sales pushed Sega to shut down offices

At a recent technology conference, Executive Vice President Michael Ribero announced that Sega of America intends to sell a million Saturns by the end of 1996.

Though it sounds like a bold announcement (Sega reported 1995 sales of only 400,000 units Stateside, as reported in the March issue of *IG's FUSION*), the company does indeed have a few tricks up its sleeves.

In Japan, Sega has announced that they will be dropping the price of the Saturn to a mere 20,000 yen (roughly $200) in a pre-emptive competitive move against the upcoming 25,000 yen ($250) Nintendo 64. Most of Sega's price drop can be attributed to a redesigned motherboard and a more integrated chipset. The new Japanese Saturns will sport slight cosmetic differences, and will no longer have the MPEG card expansion slot, but aside from those slight differences, the new model will be functionally identical to the older units While it is certain that the cheaper Saturn will make its way here—an announcement will be made at E'—it is unclear at this time whether or not the U S version will have the same cosmetic differences as the Japanese one, as different looking hardware tends to confuse consumers

In other Sega news, the company has now released some details on the U.S. version of their previously disclosed Japanese Internet modem peripheral The base cost of the modem which will be both bundled with the Saturn and sold separately, has been confirmed at $150. It will support a 14.4Kbps data transfer rate, which–while adequate–is no longer state-of-the-art, and come with a CD-ROM containing an HTML 2.0 browser (which is reportedly complete), some Internet access provider startup software and depending on the package (hardware bundle or separate purchase) a game of some kind. Unfortunately, there has been no word yet on whether or not a keyboard will be made available for the Saturn. The modem should be out before the end of the year.

Sega will also begin selling its Model 2 video game hardware configuration to other manufacturers. The Model 2, jointly designed by Sega and Lockheed Martin, has powered most of the recent batch of Sega 3-D arcade titles, such as Daytona USA, Virtua Fighter 2 and Sega Rally. This will ease the burden on smaller manufacturers who cannot spend large amounts of money on research and development of their arcade hardware, instead freeing their budgets to work on software development. One of the first non-Sega games to use the Model 2 is a new fighting game from Tecmo titled Dead or Alive, which looks largely similar to Sega's VF2 in general theme but brings more exotic Fatal Fury-style characters into competition

▲ After leading the industry with their high-end Model 2 polygon-based computer graphic (CG) board, Sega has moved on to greener pastures with Model 3 and started to allow software developers to buy Model 2 hardware for use in arcade applications. The first such title, Tecmo's Dead or Alive, is a 3-D fighter.

Not everything is rosy in Sega land, however, as Sega of Japan has posted an extraordinary 26 billion yen loss as four European subsidiaries were liquidated. The casualties in this battle are Sega's European holding company, Sega Europe Group Ltd., based in London, and Sega's sales units in Holland, Belgium and Austria The reason behind the closings is reportedly a very sluggish European video game market

After Sony snapped up the rights to Midway's popular Mortal Kombat 3, rumors began to fly about whether or not Sega would be getting a version of Mortal Kombat 3 after the exclusivity window expired. Now, Sega and Williams Entertainment (the home branch of WMS Industries, who also owns Midway) have announced that Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3, an incremental upgrade to MK3, will be coming home to the Saturn months before the PlayStation, a move which Sega hopes will boost Saturn sales the way the PlayStation exclusive MK3 helped PlayStation sales.

Saturn UMK3 should be out in the second quarter of 1996, and the exclusivity window appears to extend until October, when the Genesis and SuperNES versions of UMK3 will be released. Other next-generation MK games are planned, with the PlayStation getting UMK3 later this year, and the Nintendo 64 slated to get a Mortal Kombat game in some form as well

▲ Sega hopes the release of UMK3 for the Saturn will boost sales of the machine.

▲ Finally one-upping Sony, Sega's version of Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 will be on the shelves months before Sony gets it.

Microsoft Delivers Direct 3D API

For the last several months, several competing and incompatible hardware 3-D accelerators have hit the market, including Diamond Multimedia's NVIDIA-based Edge video board and Creative Labs' GLINT-based 3-D Blaster. This marketplace chaos has put developers in the less than enviable position of attempting to support all of these 3-D standards.

Microsoft, in an attempt to consolidate all of the emerging 3-D standards under Windows 95, has announced that beta versions of its universal 3-D standard Direct3D are currently shipping to developers. Direct3D is part of Microsoft's DirectX series of APIs (Application Programming Interfaces), which currently support tools for animation, sound, video playback and input.

The idea behind Direct3D is to provide developers with a standardized set of system calls that they can use to generate 3-D graphics. These calls are handled by the system and translated to direct hardware calls by a driver, which is written for each 3-D card.

At the moment, Direct3D appears to be enjoying wide support from both hardware manufacturers and developers. Key supporters include NVIDIA, 3DLabs, S3, Tseng Labs, id Software and Origin Systems. With the development muscle of Microsoft, it appears that 3-D accelerated PCs with Windows 95 will be formidable opponents for console manufacturers to overcome on a technical level.

One of the most promising titles under development for accelerator-equipped PCs is Namco's Rave Racer, the company's true heir to the Ridge Racer legacy. In a video preview shown to *IG*, an early demonstration of the Rave Racer city course moved with great fluidity and minimal horizon-line pop-up, despite the presence of vast numbers of polygons.

▲ **A high-res, high polygon count PC version of Namco's arcade Rave Racer (PC screens shown) will be Win 95 and PowerVR compatible.**

NEC Primes PowerVR For Homes and Arcades

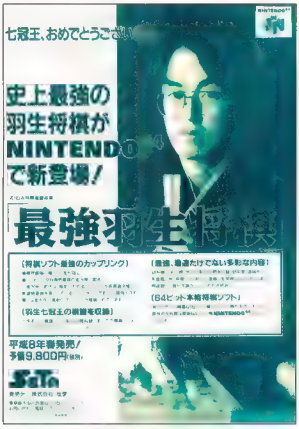
Opting to enter the highly competitive 3-D chip market with a bang, NEC Electronics and VideoLogic have teamed for the production of the PowerVR chipset, which the companies intend for use in PCs, arcades and home game consoles.

Based on a scalable design which allows developers to choose from "low-cost" and higher performance "arcade" configurations, the PowerVR chipset includes hardware support for perspective correct texture-mapping, anti-aliased textures, realtime shadows, linear MIP-mapping, and both fog and translucency effects.

At a resolution of 640x480 with a 24-Bit color palette and all effects turned on, the "low-cost" configuration can handle 257,000 10x10 (or greater) pixel triangles and the "arcade" configuration can handle 1.028 million such triangles. PowerVR supports a maximum resolution of 1024x1024 and texture bitmap sizes from 32x32 to 256x256, and can handle 16-Bit colored textures in hardware.

The home version (which can be used in PCs and game consoles) is thus on par with the Nintendo 64 and M2, while the arcade board can compete favorably with Sega and Lockheed Martin's Model 3. Interestingly, NEC has said that the chipset will be used in home consoles by 1997, which seems to imply that NEC may use the chipset to compete with current rival Matsushita's M2 and past rival Nintendo's N64, perhaps either as a new system or as an upgrade to their flagging Japanese PC-FX system.

Nintendo Pushes Japanese N64 Debut to June 23



▲ **Mario 64, PilotWings 64, and...what? Seta's Seiko Habu Shogi. A Japanese brochure heralds its coming.**

Confirming rumors mentioned in the last issue of *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION*, Nintendo Co. Ltd. in Japan recently announced that they were indeed going to be unable to make their previously announced Japanese April launch date, and have postponed the system's release until June 23. A shortfall of semiconductors from NEC was cited as the primary reason for the delay, as Nintendo found that they would only have enough parts to bring roughly 200,000 units to market, rather than the 500,000 that they had planned.

While some developers are reportedly happy to have extra time to refine and add features to their games before the launch, others have expressed disappointment that they will now face increased competition in the remaining sales months of 1996. Another U.S. delay, while as yet unannounced, is still possible, though any revised date would have to insure that N64s would still be available for this year's holiday season.

While the delay announcement was a large disappointment, Nintendo used the occasion to publicize additional details relating to the system's Japanese debut. According to the latest plan, demonstration hardware will appear tantalizingly in store windows around June 1, and the first three N64 games to hit the market have changed somewhat: Super Mario 64 is firm as a launch title, and now PilotWings 64 has been added as a second-party launch release. The true surprise is Seiko Habu Shogi, a Seta-developed adaptation of the Japanese analogue to chess, which is neither a "Dream Team" title nor exclusive in concept to the N64 hardware. Earlier versions of the game have been on the market for years, and none has taken particular advantage of a machine's higher graphics and audio capabilities. The reason? Other key games may be far from complete. Nintendo recently enlisted three assistants from Nichimen Graphics, a high-end CG specialty firm, to speed the development of N64 games.

Chip shortages were said to have caused the delay; how about games?

The Japanese Nintendo 64 will sell for 25,000 yen (about $250), as announced earlier, and all Nintendo-published games will hit the 9,800 yen (about $100) price point, which is typical for Nintendo cartridge-based software.

On occasion, *Intelligent Gamer* will devote a portion of our news space to give a voice to our readers' opinions on a recent story of importance. This issue, our letter comes from Mike Histen, who is responding to an *Intelligent Gamer* Online update on recent governmental criticisms of video game content.

IG Advocacy

IG,

I just saw your story about the senator who is speaking out against violence, decapitation, urination, etc. in video games. I got the impression that IG thinks that his concerns are totally unwarranted. Well, I'd like to make a big point that these occurrences ARE a problem.

First, I'm 15 and have been playing video games since the late '80s. When fighting games became the rage, I was interested, but after playing many of them and seeing games such as the MK series and Lethal Enforcers, I have to say that I am disgusted. In Mortal Kombat, the object is to do your best to decapitate your opponent. I have never believed that this actually encourages children and others to do this type of behavior. In fact, it's ridiculous that anyone would think that. The fact is that it's totally trivializing a horrifying and gory thing. I think the problem is mainly that it just basically makes kids think that things like this are actually cool! It's a general de-culturalization that is the problem. When this type of stuff is considered fun, things look pretty grim to me...and then there are games such as Lethal Enforcers. In this game, you are encouraged to shoot people with a realistic- (if you can forget the neon color) looking gun. This just plainly is revolting.

People say that doing these things allows you to release your frustration and stress. I believe it's the total opposite, and very much CREATES frustration and stress. I was watching a friend of mine play MK3; he began the game in a perfectly relaxed mood. In about 20 minutes, he was furious. He threw things across the room and was extremely frustrated and angry. And I've seen this in myself as well. I borrowed Killer Instinct, and as I was trying to beat the last Boss, I was so angry and tense that my hands hurt and I just generally felt really mad. I didn't release any stress. I gained some.

My point is: Don't disregard it when politicians and parents' groups speak out against such things. I personally think, though, that ratings are enough, and that there should be no further government interaction. However, people should make these changes themselves. Instead of promoting and supporting all this violence and gore, try purchasing and playing other games.

American culture in general has been deteriorating for years, and it almost looks to me as if it's reached rock bottom. Mariah Carey, a generic and personality-free singer, is the most popular musician in America. Movies such as Black Sheep reach number one. And Mortal Kombat, Lethal Enforcers and Virtua Cop are some of the most popular video games. That's pitiful Attempts to stop this de-culturalization are not pitiful.

***IG*'s Response:**

While we won't go so far as to say that government concerns about video game content are "totally unwarranted," the point must be made—as you have noted somewhat—that in the U.S., where people are born with considerable freedom to choose how they live their lives and how their money is spent, the ultimate choice to buy, use and consume should always be left in the hands of consumers, unless and only unless the product in question poses a proven substantial danger to its user which the government must play a role in preventing. Where content is questionable, ratings and warnings can play positive roles in limiting the access of children to the questionable products, and censorship of content should only in the rarest of cases (perhaps full-motion video "How to Rob a Quickie Mart Starring Dana Plato" or a "Make Your Own Fertilizer Bomb With Marky Mark" CDs) be tolerable.

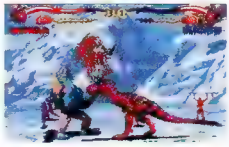
With that said, it might not be the best idea to have your average 11- or 12-year-old playing Mortal Kombat...but then, where do you draw the line? Think back to yourself at those ages and consider whether you were mature enough to handle such content at that age. Moreover, should a 12-year-old be prevented from playing a Virtua Fighter-style nearly bloodless martial arts game when even younger children are being taught kickboxing, Capoiera and Tai Kwon Do? Stepping back even further, there are some parents who believe that even Mario and Sonic games have no redeeming value, so how do you explain to them that some video games are just sophisticated puzzles with flashy artwork? These are not easy questions to answer, and if they were, someone would have done so by now without angering entertainment industries, parents or government officials.

Should a 12-year-old be prevented from playing Virtua Fighter when even younger children are learning karate?

The solution sought is censorship, and from the sound of your contempt for certain "pitiful" performers, movies and games, it seems as if you're awfully concerned about what other people should be enjoying and not enjoying—that's the sort of attitude which makes censorship possible. From your standpoint, Carey's too generic, *Black Sheep* doesn't contain your specific sort of humor and the games are too specifically violent for your tastes. Clearly, if these things are so popular, your views on each are in a minority and there are plenty of people who would disagree with you, and imagine what would happen if all of those people decided that they wanted to complain about the things that you enjoy? Stay focused on the products, performers and experiences that you like and leave the rest for other people to sort out, because this world is thankfully large enough for more than one esoteric view of what is "good" and what is not.

A final word must be said, though, about a world in which people decide to behave irrationally after partaking in entertainment experiences: If you're the type of person who starts throwing things around the room and getting mad when you're playing video games, either you're playing the wrong type of games or you're in serious need of therapy. Most people get involved with video games to [a] have fun and [b] see how much either the computer or friends can provide challenges to your current level of skill. If you're not having fun when you're playing a game, you're doing something by choice that is making you upset, and by definition you would be a masochist; it may be time to find a new hobby.

The Newsblurb: In recent days, Hillary Clinton made a rare public statement on the subject of video game violence, referring to the dangers of games such as Mortal Kombat. Following the retraction of Primal Rage games from a chain of stores based on one mother's complaint about a scene where a dinosaur urinates, *IG* learned that the office of Senator Joseph Lieberman was calling around to investigate the need for a second round of video game violence hearings.



▲ **Do games such as these inspire stress, anger and possibly violence? Mike Histen claims that they do.**

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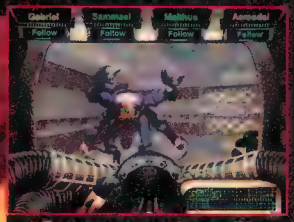

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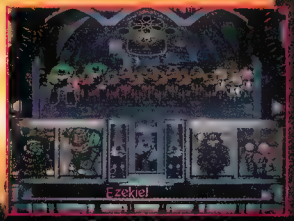

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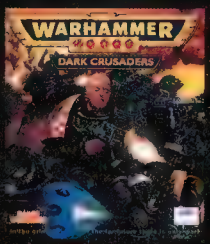

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ACME '96

Sega's new VF3 and Model 3 board arrive to pummel the competition

Following months of internal delay, and widespread rumor and speculation within the gaming community, the highly anticipated Sega Lockheed/Martin Model 3 motherboard came roaring to three-dimensional life at the 10th annual American Coin Machine Exposition in Orlando, Fla. Despite the fact that there was no game to play, a mere four minutes of Virtua Fighter 3 footage still packed enough of a wallop to rate as an overwhelming "Most Impressive of Show," despite the high profile A.C.M.E. unveiling of Midway's equally awaited 3-D beat-em-up War Gods. **"Generated directly from Model 3 realtime C.G. System."**

This was the unmistakable message on the large placard placed in front of the two big screen Monitors running the VF3 demo. Additionally, the Sega representative made it a point to open the accompanying cabinet and show attendees first hand the impressive-looking board beneath. (Attempting, no doubt, to head off nagging speculation in the wake of AOU as to what it was actually running on.)

The demo starts beautifully with a new character, Jiaoi, gracefully executing delicate Japanese dance movements, resplendent in a classic Oriental kimono replete with colorful cherry blossoms. After this hypnotic tableau, the view zooms in for a close-up of the character's facial features. This gives the M-3 an opportunity to show off its formidable million polygon-per-second rendering power. Particularly impressive are her mobile eye pupils which have a hauntingly real quality that brilliantly extends the illusion of humanity beyond mere pixels on a screen.

And this is only the beginning, as Dural makes a dramatic appearance morphing out of a pool of liquid metal a la *Terminator 2*. The minute and precise background color reflections off of her shimmering mirrored skin are indeed a sight to behold.

▲ **An early image for Virtua Fighter, Dural in a liquid metal state.**

With a graphical punch that truly rivals high-end workstations, VF3 appears to have all the elements in place to fairly obliterate the competition.

VF3's backgrounds have similarly achieved a tangible degree of realism. You feel the fighters are actually in these environments rather than just standing in front of them—witness Jiaoi's poetically melancholy winterscape, with drifting snowflakes, white-capped rock face and sprinkling waterfalls. In Jeffry's stage, the screen cinematically zooms into a white sandbar spotlighted amongst a bed of aqua sea, as the dreadlocked brawler assumes hilarious muscle poses and mockingly glares at the screen. Lau's setting finds the Chinese chef in a picturesque Asian courtyard against a striking panorama of purple/gold sunset. Brown leaves flying from his heels, he performs the demo's most exciting and dynamic move: He runs right up the side of the wall, somersaults over his opponent, grabs him in mid air and flips him to the ground.

As strong as the board's performance appears to be, however, there did seem to be a bit of room for improvement. I noticed some image clarity degradation when the character was distant. Also, minor dot crawl was evident on the scaling of eyes and scrolling of shiny clothing details. In addition, although the fighters' faces are rapidly approaching perfection, there is still some angularity to their bodies.

◀ **Exclusive to VF3, Aoi is the embodiment of grace and power.**

These quibbles aside, it would be hard to imagine a more impressive debut for Sega's synergy of AM2 and Lockheed Martin. With an unprecedented graphical punch that truly rivals Silicon Graphic workstations, VF3 has all the elements in place to obliterate the competition

Immortal Kombat

Despite the powerhouse presence of VF at the show, many other "A" titles on display provided enough firepower to steal some spotlight. With the release of War Gods, Midway Manufacturing appears to have delivered a solid evolutionary brawler, which while sporting sharp graphics and interesting features could experience difficulty distinguishing itself from its obvious MK lineage. Using a blend of science-fiction, mythological and ancient Egyptian themes, the game's designers have succeeded in creating an eerie and evocative mood for the otherworldly odyssey. The inclusion of both three-dimensional projectiles and fatalities, plus an innovative 3-D action button that allows character movement around the entire fighting arena, will hopefully provide War Gods with enough diversity and cachet to satisfy Kombat devotees until the launch of MK4 in September. *IG's* most recent rumor on MK4—a true 3-D update to the MK series...we'll believe it when we see it.

▲ **War Gods pushes the limits of belief incorporating science fiction, mythology and cross dressing.**

Smoking guns

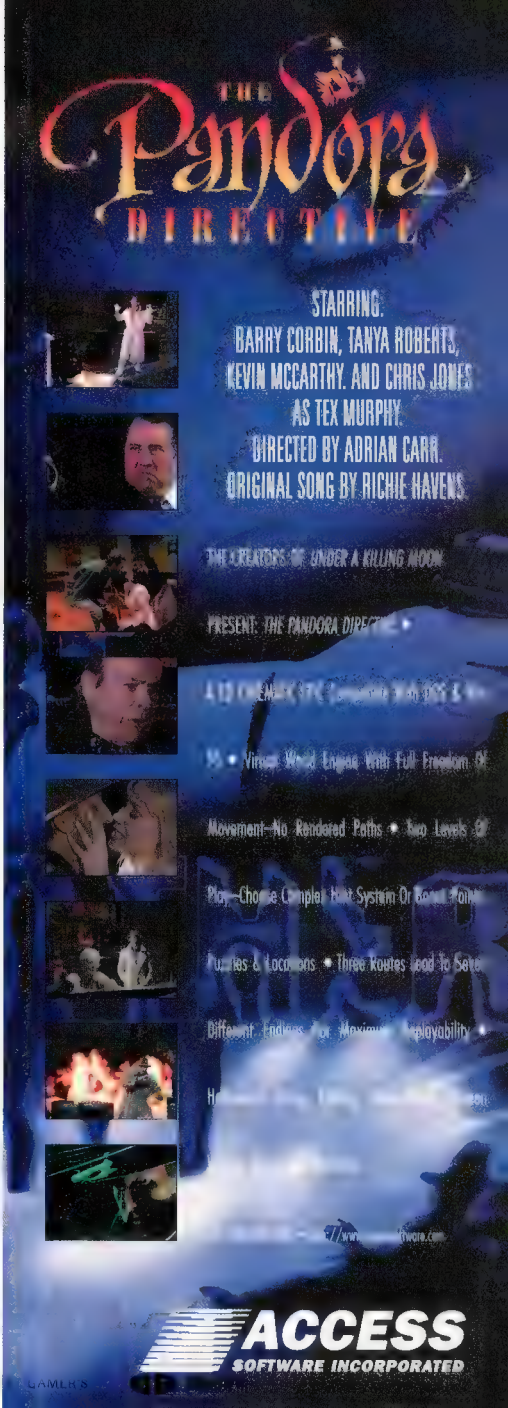
Meanwhile, Sega and Namco's projectile palindrome continues, with each company taking turns trumping one another's latest polygonal plugfest. Namco's Time Crisis was looking every bit the Virtua Cop killer. So, what's a poor Sega to do? Bring out the heavy artillery! And that's exactly what they have done in the form of Gun Blade. Gun Blade takes you on a dizzying helicopter blitzkrieg of a crime-infested city as a machine-gun toting marauder. The swirling, high-flying camera perspective, coupled with sensational three-dimensional explosive effects–and satisfying, 'make 'em dance' gatling gun–made it a toss-up between GB and Time Crisis for the high caliber crown

Best of the rest

There were other noteworthy games, including Virtua On: Cyber Troopers, Sega's great-looking mech meets Cybersled scenario. Dynamic projectiles and fluid/frenetic cat-and-mouse mayhem distinguish this high tech handywork. Batman Forever is the first title for Acclaim's new arcade division. Utilizing their motion-capture technology, they have delivered a terrific-looking, rendered Final-Fight fest. SNK was showing Metal Slug, a sharp Contra clone, displaying a lot of entertaining ersatz charm. Wave Shark is Konami's splashy attempt to one-up Alpine Racer, complete with rideable Jet Ski. It provided some bouncy white-water thrills in an early rev. Capcom was displaying Street Fighter Alpha 2, their latest incremental upgrade to the venerable Street Fighter series. Star Gladiators, their new 3-D fighter was nowhere to be seen. Namco's Tokyo Wars could be aptly described as Desert Tank II, in an urban environ. Tokyo Wars features cool team/link-up play with independent turret control and recoil. Sega's ride-on Manx TT is an exciting, realistic, motorbike milieu, complete with jumps, while Virtua Fighter Kids/Sonic the Fighters are veritably interchangeable Sega Titan board bop-a-thons aimed at the pre-teen market. The fighters could' have novelty appeal, if they reach these shores. Also hot were Konami's Run and Gun 2, which features improved character animation, audio and gameplay, and NBA Jam Extreme, a 3-D Jam update.

Anything else? Sega's Cut the Cheese. "...in this new comical coin roll adventure...players...will burst out in laughter as coins fly through the air and plop into the motorized potty." Let's hope Yu Suzuki wasn't involved.

◀ **Look for Konami's Run and Gun 2 coming soon offering improved gameplay and animation.**



IG Overheard

Capcom Plans for Arcades

Intelligent Gamer has learned that Capcom has been auditioning arcade hardware to replace their aging CPS2 board in arcades, and apparently, having been shown the Titan, PSX-style System 11, Nintendo 64-compatible board and **M2** hardware, they've ruled out both the Sega and Nintendo hardware for arcade machine use. Capcom does like the PlayStation-compatible board for various reasons, including its price-to-performance ratio, but as they're looking to become competitive on the high end in the near future, it looks as if they could find themselves in Konami's boat, licensing the M2 chipset for their realtime 3-D games...

Powering Up the N64

An interesting process begins every time new game hardware is released: Developers are initially forced to work within a set of programming limitations ("libraries" of pre-written code and an operating system [OS]) imposed by the hardware's manufacturer, generally in an attempt to insure that when a new version of the machine is released, all of the software programmed for the old version will work without crashing. The dilemma here is one of initial power maximization: Unless the early libraries and operating system really tap all of the machine's abilities—and, realistically, none have done that—programmers are prevented from getting all of the horsepower out of a piece of hardware.

The other extreme was **Atari's Jaguar** strategy: All but entirely ignore the need for an OS and allow developers to directly "bang the metal." In other words, write whatever code they feel will use the hardware nicely. From these two extremes (OS/no OS), there is a tradeoff: Good OSes and libraries give even bad developers a lot of audiovisual power to play with, restricting only great developers from using the machine more fully. Having no OS means that the worst developers will barely tap the machine's abilities and will utterly fail to produce anything impressive, while the best will squeeze out a bit of extra power from the machine early on. Most companies opt to use an OS and a full set of libraries to initially level the playing field, and then eventually allow coders to bang the metal when they've grown far beyond the limitations of the early OS.

Third-party **N64** developers thus far have been restricted (by Nintendo) to using a fine set of SGI graphics and sound libraries to develop their software, but have been told that they can expect to jettison the restrictions as soon as the second-generation of software comes into development. As a result, the initial 3-D software you see on the N64 will be uniform in presentation: true SGI-style 3-D worlds rather than the "fake" 3-D (often glitchy sprite mapping) done with the **PlayStation** and Saturn, utilizing anti-aliasing, MIP-mapping and interpolation quite thoroughly. The second-generation will then be able to truly blow away the early games, as many of the hardware-supported (polygon quality-enhancing) features will be tossed in favor of polygon quantity-enhancing tricks and other code hacks. High polygon count games such as Quake will be more possible in the second-generation, whereas more polished and subtly enhanced versions of older polygon games such as Doom will dominate the first-generation.

Nintendo's New Project

Rumor among developers has it that Nintendo ultimately decided to release the **Virtual Boy** when its designer, Gumpei Yokoi, pushed the machine past a number of people who raised questions about its market viability. According to rumor, when the machine's sales flatlined after initial launch dates in Japan and North America, the machine's most prominent supporter—in line with the Japanese tradition of (nearly) lifelong employment—was allegedly assigned a "window seat" in the company, which (rather than firing him) means that he gets to continue working at Nintendo, but in a job where his work is considered as irrelevant to the company as having him staring out of a window all day long. His job? Making more games for the Virtual Boy. Which leaves **Nintendo** in a precarious situation: What sort of portable games are they supposed to sell when the Virtual Boy isn't a product people are buying? The VB experience has taught the company two things: First, never release a "portable" machine that fully isolates the player from the rest of his or her world (i.e., "virtual" goggles), as people will want to play games when they're on subways and in other places where open vision is required. Second, never again release a machine with a substantially limited color palette (GB: two colors [black/yellow], four total shades; VB: two colors [black/red], 256 total shades), as the press and the consumer are always left with unpleasant feelings about the limitations. What's their solution? Surprise: Not a portable Super NES (as would be the obvious choice), but instead, a color **Game Boy**. Tens of millions of Game Boys have been sold worldwide on the strength of Nintendo's name and support, and Nintendo is loathe to lose their sales by forgetting the two lessons learned above. Current rumors place the target price for the machine in the upper portion of the $100-$150 range, with a color display and a core 32-Bit RISC processor which will use little additional hardware for graphics and sounds. Like the Virtual Boy, it will be able to handle simple scaling and rotation effects along with a simple polygon engine, but unlike the VB, the color display and shape will make it a solid travel companion. Key developers will be receiving development kits within the next month and a half, and the system will likely be launched sometime late this year or early in 1997. *IG*'s wish list feature: full SuperNES compatibility and a VB game adapter. We won't hold our breath.

Matsushita's M2 Controller

Here's *IG*'s artist rendition of Matsushita's new M2 controller, which features an N64-style analog thumbstick in the center, a second central button and analog (pressure-sensitive) L and R shift buttons up top. Missing? An N64 under-the-pad trigger and left/right handles.

Planning a Splash for E³

The highlight of Nintendo's booth for **E³** is said to be a huge, rented half-million dollar television set (and before you wonder, it's not a **Sony**) that will constantly flash Nintendo 64 images through the convention center in Los Angeles.

For the first time in several years, Nintendo is jettisoning their monkey bar geodesic dome in favor of an entirely new setup. The rumor we've been hearing about their Nintendo 64 launch plan for North America? A $199 USA MSRP for the machine sans **Mario**, with a $249 plumber pack-in price tag. Why: Nintendo is said to be concerned that Sony and Sega will be lowering their core machines to $199 a piece (still a hot rumor), and doesn't want to get involved in a software pack-in war. If Nintendo packs in a game at a truly competitive price, Sony or **Sega** can toss in five CD games and change the entire equation in their favor.

Developing for the M2

It's easy to believe that the proper use of vast amounts of raw power will require greater control and mastery than the use of smaller amounts of narrow or focused powers. While developers found it easy to program for R.J. Mical and Dave Needle's original 3DO Cel engines, the M2 hardware is a large-scale comparative challenge. When asked to rank machines from easiest to hardest on a scale, the classic **3DO** was ranked easiest by developers, the PlayStation and Nintendo 64 next at some distance away, the Saturn next—at least given the current state of knowledge about the system's hardware, which has made programming a bit simpler—then the M2 and finally Pentium-equipped PCs (minus custom development libraries). Development time for M2 games may thus take somewhat longer and require more skilled programmers than those who have developed for relatively easier platforms, and like the Saturn and PCs, the games will look pretty good at first but will truly begin to show their full potential after developers master the new chips.

According to documents provided to developers, the final specification of M2 hardware is currently capable of rendering 700,000 non-connected 10x10 pixel texture-mapped triangles per second with no effects turned on, 525,000 with Gouraud shading and no texture-mapping and 307,000 with texture-mapping, shading and all other hardware graphics effects turned on. Note that "non-connected" is an important phrase here — the numbers rise markedly when you have two or more triangles sharing vertices/edges. Additionally, all of these numbers depend on the machine to be doing nothing else (i.e., allowing a game to be played) save generating polygons, so you shouldn't expect to see the machine actually performing at these numbers unless you're just watching non-interactive demo screens.

3DO Systems: The Next Generation

Featured in the last issue of *IG's FUSION* was 3DO Systems, the hardware development arm of the 3DO Company responsible in large measure for the development of the M2 chipset and related hardware configurations for home, arcade and PC use. *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* has learned that two new chipsets are now under development by the company: one a short-term enhanced version of the current M2 hardware spec and the other an entirely new "wish list" design for what the post 32-/64-Bit era will demand.

3DO Systems' first project, currently proceeding in development under the code name **MX**, has been described by sources familiar with the chipset as "M2 on steroids." First, the meaning of the code name: M is derived from the past M2 chipset name, which was short for "Mark 2," or version 2, and the X is intended to signify the chips' currently unspecified relationship to their M2 predecessor. (This is akin to Mega Man X, 19XX or any mathematical "X" where X is an unknown number—presumably higher than its predecessors—in a series.)

In prototype stages for 2-3 months, MX offers twice the performance power of the M2 chipset by enhancing the M2 graphics processor and generally retaining the other components. MX will have both hardware anti-aliasing—a feature noticeably missing from M2 but present in the Nintendo 64—and hardware clipping. The chipset is currently intended for PC and arcade use rather than home applications, as Matsushita is seeking to make the core M2 technology a home standard through use in game consoles, **DVD** players and other consumer applications.

Their second project, about which much less has been currently defined by 3DO Systems, currently proceeds under the codename S42. The name's origin is rumored to be the product of electronic engineer-style humor: S is just a different letter than M and 42 is (as any sci-fi humor buff will tell you) the flawed answer to the meaning of life as calculated by the computer Deep Thought in the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. According to the current story, 3DO Systems engineers have not even settled on a particular spec for the hardware as of yet—they're simply coming up with developers' wish lists of features that hardware beyond the current 64-Bit barriers would contain. Keeping in mind that they're planning for the release of hardware three to five years from now; imagine what sort of forecasting must be proceeding within the walls of the 3DO company today...

M2 International Connections Become Clearer

The play team at Iwata then the launch of the 3DO? Matsushita and its partners have been quietly working to garner international third-party support for the M2 hardware spec.

According to sources inside 3DO, have named a large group of Japanese and European companies that have become third-party licensees for the M2 architecture: Namco, Gems, Glams, Headlink, Hudson Soft, Imagineer, Jaleco, Konami, Koei, MicroCabin, Nintendo, Pioneer Video, Sofel, Sonic, Takara, Taito and TonyTase are the Japanese companies that have been licensed, although rides they are produce are currently sketchy. (Koei, for example, is known mostly for their strategy games and Takara more over heard with Toshinden.)

Konami is the only officially announced licensee of the group thus far.

M2 is also getting Europe, announced so endorsed by the signing of some notable third-party companies such as Bullfrog, 3DO, Crystal Dynamics, Ocean and Virgin USA. Smaller European development teams have also joined the ranks, including Blue Byte, Cryo, Elite, Infogrames, Silicon Dreams, Team 17 and Psygnosis. Titles have not as of yet been consolidated.

The following games are mentioned and expected to be ready around the time M2 components hardware begins to hit the market for shortly thereafter:

Capcom - One title, unnamed
Crystal Dynamics - Untitled M2 Baseball
Electronic Arts - Madden 96, NHL Hockey, FIFA Road Rash
Interplay - Clayfighter 3, Descent M2, Kasumi of Japan
Konami - Arcade 3-D title, unnamed
Origin - Wing Commander IV
Panasonic/ Williams - War Gods, NHL Open ice
Silicon Dreams/US Gold - Olympic Soccer
Silent Software - Return Fire 2
Spectrum Holobyte - Top Gun
Studio 3DO - M2 Golf, IMSA Racing (simulation)
Warp - D's II

Rumored:

Capcom - One 3-D fighting game (perhaps Star Gladiators), unnamed
Williams - NBA Jam Extreme

Other Confirmed Titles Under Development Worldwide:

Activision - Mechwarrior (ii)
Blue Byte - Battle Asia
Bullfrog - Magic Carpet 2
Crystal Dynamics - Gex 2
Electronic Arts - Need For Speed II
Elite - Soccer
DID - Eurofighter 2000
id - Quake
Interplay - Rock 'N' Roll Racing
Millennium - Killer, Super Bikes
Ocean - H.M.S. Carnage, Silver
Rage - Soccer
Silicon Dreams/U.S. Gold - Olympic Decathlon
Team 17 - Ironblood - According to the current rumor, which has been stated on IronBlood III, so plans were laid, Mechwarrior, screenshots, following their publication, T2 tried to hit 3DO up for cash to develop the game. The Team company declined and T2 is now planning a PC version instead.
SSI - Deathkeep
Studio 3DO - [illegible] including the two licensed sports games, Sports Illustrated Football, Golfers, Golfscape, Command (Star Control 2-style), Power Crystal (realtime 3-D RPG)
U.S. Gold - Dream Team Basketball
Virgin UK - Heart of Darkness

WMS Acquires Atari Games; U.S. Gold Changes Hands

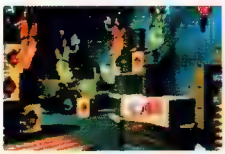
In another round of corporate acquisitions and reshuffling, WMS Industries, the parent company of Midway Manufacturing and Williams Entertainment, has announced that they intend to purchase Atari Games from Time Warner.

Atari Games, now known as Time Warner Interactive, is one of the few arcade manufacturers left in the United States, with recent titles including Primal Rage, T-Mek and Area 51. Some of the label's past titles include their release of Namco's classic rotating overhead tank game Assault, their own Steel Talons attack helicopter arcade-style simulation and the early polygon driving games Hard and Race Drivin'.

WMS' acquisition does not include the use of the name "Time Warner Interactive," and Time Warner plans to continue releasing games for the various home systems under one of their own labels, perhaps Time Warner Electronic Publishing.

In other corporate news, U.S. Gold's parent company, Centre Gold U.K., will merge with Eidos, a company responsible for the development of high-end 3-D chipsets. Eidos has been consolidating several European software labels under its corporate mantle, including both Domark and Big Red, and their merger with Centre Gold will add a considerable number of software titles and developers to their rosters.

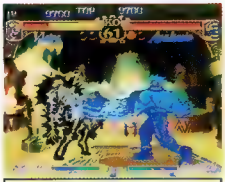
The merger is not expected to have any impact on the U.S. Gold imprint nor their product lineup, which includes such upcoming 1996 games as Olympic Summer Games, Olympic Soccer and Dream Team Basketball (previewed this issue).



▲ Area 51, the last game released by Time Warner Interactive into arcades.

HOT top ten...

IG's FUSION counts down the best of this month's games...



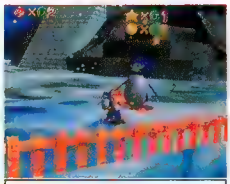
CURRENT RELEASE TOP 10

1. **Night Warriors: DarkStalkers Revenge** Sega/Saturn
2. **Panzer Dragoon Zwei** Sega/Saturn
3. **Street Fighter Alpha** Capcom/PlayStation-Saturn
4. **Command and Conquer** Westwood/PC-CD
5. **WipeOut** Sony Psygnosis/ PlayStation & PC-CD
6. **Descent II** Interplay/PC-CD
7. **Virtua Fighter 2** Sega/Saturn
8. **Sega Rally Championship** Sega/Saturn
9. **WarHawk** Sony/PlayStation
10. **Toshinden 2** Playmates/PlayStation

ARCADE GAMES

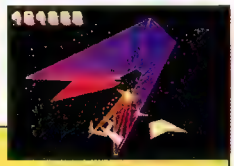
1. **Tekken 2** Namco
2. **Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3** Midway
3. **Marvel Super Heroes** Capcom
4. **Open Ice** Midway
5. **Mortal Kombat 3** Midway
6. **Viper** Fabtek
7. **Samurai Shodown II** SNK
8. **Puzzle De Pon** SNK
9. **WWF Wrestlemania** Midway
10. **X-Men: Children of the Atom** Capcom

Courtesy of RePlay Magazine, March 1996



EDITORS' MOST WANTED

1. **Super Mario 64** Nintendo / N64
2. **Tetrisphear** H2O / N64
3. **Contra 32** Konami / PlayStation and Saturn
4. **Pilotwings 64** Paradigm / N64
5. **Final Fantasy VII** Square,/ PlayStation
6. **Rave Racer** Namco / Win95 CD
7. **King of Fighters '95** SNK / Saturn
8. **Killer Instinct 64** Rare + Nintendo / N64
9. **Sonic 3-D** Sega / Saturn
10. **Tekken 2** Namco / PlayStation



From Jon Folkersm (folkers@cais.com)

READERS' ONLINE TOP 10

1. **Tempest 2000** Atari/Jaguar
2. **Virtua Fighter 2** Sega/Saturn
3. **Daytona USA** Sega/Saturn
4. **Defender 2000** Atari/Jaguar
5. **Sega Rally Championship** Sega/Saturn
6. **WarCraft** Blizzard/PC
7. **Earthworm Jim 2** Playmates/Genesis
8. **Earthworm Jim Special Edition** Interplay/Sega-CD
9. **TIE Fighter Collectors' CD** Lucasarts/PC-CD
10. **Vectorman** Sega/Genesis

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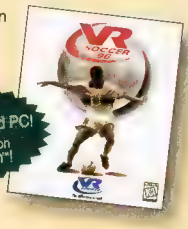

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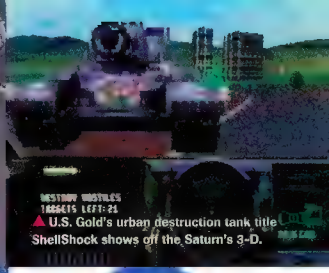
▲ Virgin's NHL Powerplay was a strong demonstration of how hockey can be made 32-Bit.

▲ Showing support for the Saturn, Sega snagged an exclusivity window on Bubsy3.



▲ U.S. Gold's urban destruction tank title ShellShock shows off the Saturn's 3-D.

SEGA ATTACKS ON MU

▲ Steve Payne, executive vice president/product development and Gary Griffiths, SegaSoft executive vice president /chief operating officer

SEGA shows its latest wares to anxious IG editors in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles and speaks on the subject of the newly independent SegaSoft development house.

▲ Guardian Heroes, reviewed in last month's *IG's FUSION*, is a 2-D brawl fest.

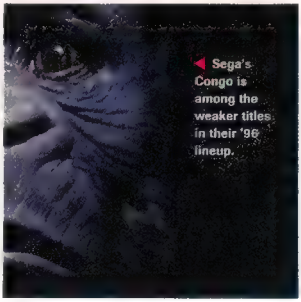
▼ Panzer Dragoon 2, previewed in last issue's FUSION, blows away its predecessor with better aesthetics play.

ULTIPLE FRONTS

Though the rest of the world is preparing quietly for May's Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, Sega of America decided to warm up its audience in advance by conducting a multi-city pre-E³ press tour, the results of which will no doubt begin to appear in the May issues of most magazines. Sega's goal: to contrast Nintendo's Shoshinkai two-game N64 premiere, in which the company opted to spotlight only two games that were to exemplify the depth of gameplay and multi-player features the N64 will ultimately offer. Instead, Sega wanted their press tour to focus attention on many of their early 1996 games, upcoming arcade ports and third-party titles in advance of the show, leaving E³ as a showcase for a few hitherto secret flagship projects.

The plan achieved most of its desired results. Unlike Shoshinkai, where players would have been overwhelmed with 15 new games had Nintendo played all of its cards, and disappointed when Nintendo opted to focus on only two, Sega was able to use this early opportunity to preview a comprehensive set of quality products to appeal to gamers across the board, while explaining to the harder-core gaming press that they should keep their eyes open at E³ for major Sega announcements and debuts. Their New York preview, attended by three *Intelligent Gamer* editors at New York's highbrow Righa Royal hotel, focused on more than 10 Sega-brand games which ranged from so-so to excellent in appearance, and seven third-party titles which were supposed to be among the cream of their externally developed crop. Most of the third-party games were impressive–moreso, in fact, than anyone familiar with anti-Saturn hype would have believed–and Sega used the event to explain to the press that both in-house and third-party developers have truly gained an advanced level of mastery over the Saturn hardware at this point, which has resulted in better-looking games than the machine could boast of having before.

Case in point: Panzer Dragoon 2 and Guardian Heroes, examined in last month's issue of *IG's FUSION*, were distinctively better-looking games than had been attempted on the PlayStation to date. Panzer 2's fast, fluid texture-mapping engine and simplified arcade-style gameplay will no doubt prove engrossing and worthwhile to players turned off by the complex controls of Sony's WarHawk, and newly added features for increased depth (multiple paths, dragon power-building) make the game more than just a standard 3-D shooter. Guardian Heroes uses superior gameplay and graphics to tap a genre in America that has not yet been



◀ Sega's Congo is among the weaker titles in their '96 lineup.

covered here by 32-Bit platforms–the walk-and-brawl game. (Notably, Japanese walk and brawl titles such as Technosoft's PlayStation Hot Blooded Family have not been picked up for American distribution, and no one else has rushed to release Final Fight-style beat-'em-ups for the U.S. market.) GH's combination of Street Fighter-style special attacks, six-player simultaneous gameplay and Treasure's high-end sprite engine make for an impressive experience, all of which Sega was quick to point out.

NBA Action '96, shown in Sega press kits for roughly a year, is said to be close to completion. Smooth character animation and a 3-D polygonal court will be highlights, as will the distinctive running commentary of Marv Albert. As always, Sega will have team and major player licenses for the game.

Another title on the "interesting" side was Virtua Fighter Mini (mentioned briefly in last month's Japan Today), an eight-character (minus Jeffry) 2-D (non-polygon) Game Gear rendition of Sega's 3-D fighter, complete with new background artwork and a similar control scheme to that found in the Saturn and arcade VF games. As you might expect, Sega was creative in porting 3-D graphics to the Game Gear: Characters are blown-up, chunky 8x16 sprites using similar software technology to that found in the Game Gear's earlier V.R. Troopers. There are two visual modes which toggle between having the characters take up a large portion of the screen and moving to a more distant view where the characters are much smaller. It was only impressive considering the hardware.

Only a few of Sega's titles seemed bland, and those titles weren't being actively shown to the non-gaming press: a 3-D shooting and maze game based on the (ahem) hit movie *Congo*, which even the press tour staff agreed was a poor license to have to develop. Sega has also decided to rush Battle Arena Toshinden Remix (official U.S. name) to market, fixing a few of the Japanese game's problems (a few infinite damage combos and other minor problems) but leaving the rest of the game intact rather than polishing it to perfection—a time issue more than anything else.

Having received the final version at *IG's* offices, we were disappointed; TSD Remix is still a visual mess, and it doesn't even play as well as the PlayStation original did.

The Saturn's third-party titles were looking pretty sharp, though. Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3—a multi-month Saturn exclusive—and Night

Sega's '96 Arcade Port Lineup

Shown only on video tape were four of Sega's arcade games—Fighting Vipers, Manx T.T. Super Bike, Virtua Cop 2 and Virtual On: Cyber Troopers. None were shown in Saturn form yet—actual home pictures are to be forthcoming in several weeks—but all look like solid "B-list" Saturn releases in the same vein as Sega Rally and Virtua Cop. "B-list?" you ask—well, most companies internally rate their games to determine how much of a promotional push they merit, and if Sega rated Virtua Fighter 3, a new Daytona game or a Sonic game, those would be "A-list" games. Sky Target (a Sega Model 2 arcade update to Afterburner and G-LOC) could have been a breakthrough title as the company hasn't released an arcade-style flight simulation in the Afterburner vein for some time, but the game is not on release lists for this year.

Fighting Vipers, a VF-style fighting game, has unique twists (cages used for extra-special moves, "sub-pop" characters who wear armor and less-than-subtle ("PEPSI!") product endorsements), but it hasn't exactly taken over arcades or taken the place of VF in the hearts and minds of most players...primarily because its arcade distribution is low, roughly on par with Sega's previous North American Virtua Fighter 1 roll-out. Fighting Vipers should be an easier port than VF was for the Saturn, however, as the backgrounds use more subtle 3-D effects and could easily be changed to parallaxing bitmapped art.

▲ **Arcade screenshots shown.**

Manx T.T. Super Bike is Sega's racing entry for this season and was originally set to share that spotlight with Indy 500, an F-1 game which Sega had originally intended to launch as a Model 3 racer and—amidst delays in Model 3 development—scaled down and released on the Daytona and Sega Rally Model 2 board. As Indy 500 has been pulled from Sega release charts (apparently in an effort to insure that translation team members don't need to spread their expertise thin on two racers at once) for some undetermined length of time, Manx T.T.—a Hang On-style motorcycle racing game which has comparatively (with Daytona) pared-down track scenery—should be a reasonable Saturn port.

Virtua Cop 2 and Virtual On look like the more challenging ports in the bunch. VC2, in the arcades, is essentially an improved Virtua Cop engine with 60 frame-per-second updating, vehicle chases and better enemy characters, all of which will push the Saturn to even greater heights than those reached with last year's excellent VC port. Expect the FPS rate to drop in the conversion process.

Virtual On presents even greater technical challenges as Sega came up with a relatively ambitious combination of Cyber Sled's gameplay and Voltron-style Japanese mech designs, placing the combination on the high-resolution and polygon-intense Model 2 arcade board. The characters are wonderfully detailed and attack each other with intensely visual moves, but the nature of those arcade graphics and the detailed 3-D backgrounds will make VO a true challenge to port correctly.

Compared with a new Virtua Fighter or Daytona, there's nothing stellar in Sega's arcade port lineup...but that probably won't stop the hype engine.

Warriors both give the Saturn some much-needed 2-D fighting game action, while U.S Gold's Shell Shock, Scavenger's Amok and Scorcher and Psygnosis' Destruction Derby all seem to prove definitively that the Saturn can handle 3-D quite well. Destruction Derby, shown on video tape, looked precisely like its PlayStation predecessor in limited footage we verified as actually Saturn (though Sega noted that DD would lose its PS Jumbotron TV screen), and Sega claimed that the code porting time had been relatively short and painless. WipeOut is apparently finished and ready to go, with Destruction Derby close behind.

The much-hyped Amok and Scorcher were interesting, though not mindblowing: In their very early forms, Amok (an underwater shooter) stood out mostly for its combination of a 3-D sprite engine with a limited 3-D Voxel-background engine—the horizon line on the Voxel engine was reasonable considering that you're supposed to be in a slightly murky sea—and Scorcher, (a racing game) was most impressive for its dark environments and unique racers, who ride inside of floating green-glowing energy cages. Scavenger's previous Genesis games (Sub Terrania and Red Zone) have been hyped mainly for their innovative graphics rather than their so-so gameplay, and though their X-Men 32X/Saturn game went from cancellation on the 32X to life on the Saturn, it has been killed again. The game's development was said to be troubled by time-consuming character modeling, amongst other problems. Notably, Sega's Saturn title Free Runner (a cyberpunk adventure with frustrated SMV character sequences) has been canned as well.

The best third-party title? NHL Powerplay '96 by Virgin contained a surprisingly refined, fast and detailed 3-D engine and solid AI.

But what should we expect to see at E³? Sonic. While Sega has not spoken officially on the subject, *IG's FUSION* has learned that several different versions of a 3-D Sonic game were under exploration by Sega, including some code on the Saturn similar to Bug!, some similar in concept to the earlier Genesis titles and one title that was originally coded using the Nvidia multimedia chip used in the Diamond Edge 3-D boards. Surprisingly enough, the best of the bunch was chosen as the Nvidia-compatible title, which is now continuing development as a Saturn game and will have a 3-D engine quite similar to Nights (see above). Sonic games will launch across all Sega platforms at E³; the focus will be upon the Saturn version.

▶ **What should we expect at E³? Sonic across every Sega platform. Saturn Sonic will be in 3-D...**

Sega used tours in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles to explain to the press that developers have truly gained an advanced level of mastery over the Saturn hardware.

Steve Apour, Bug Too's producer, describes the new game as being a roller coaster experience that will make gamers puke...from activity.

Bug Too!

At one time, Sega intended the new character Bug! to do for Saturn platformers what Sonic the Hedgehog had done for the Genesis—provide breakthrough new visual tricks and play mechanics which would lure gamers into purchases of Sega's "next level" of hardware. Bug did well, peaking at number two on North American Saturn sales charts and remaining in the top five, even following the release of Sega's highest profile VF2, Virtua Cop and Sega Rally releases; but the game's producer isn't satisfied quite yet

IG was recently given the opportunity to speak with Steve Apour, Away Team member and producer of SegaSoft's sequel, Bug Too!, and formerly Sega of America's producer of Bug! Working with development house RealTime Associates, Apour has helped to re-define the Bug! character for the second-generation of Saturn software.

"Bug Too! is a continuation of Bug!'s story," says Apour. "In Bug!, he was an 'interactive entertainment actor'...now he's a big actor, being wooed by a bunch of producer types. They're pitching him their next games as he's sitting in the back of a limousine." Cue the dream sequence wavy graphic effect, and Bug! imagines himself as the star of each of the new games.

The dream sequence concept gave SegaSoft and RealTime a chance to go even wilder with character designs, level concepts and bonus stages than they did in Bug! While the first levels are just a little more creative than Bug!'s, the later stages become increasingly imaginative and challenging to design. Bug Too!'s "Mythological level," according to Apour, is a combination of Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek and other ancient themes in one place, the "Haunted Medieval level" combines a haunted mansion, graveyard, castle and medieval dungeon, and an outer space level has the sort of goofy sci-fi elements you might expect. The truly weird levels begin with "Carnival Circus," where you face dozens of bizarre enemies while walking a tight rope and witnessing a freak show; "Magic Crystal level," a water level complete with retro water playthings such as Sea Monkeys and Magic Crystals; "Psychedelic Retro" stages including paisley patterns as backgrounds, some Alice in Wonderland themes (shrinking/growing) and a walk through a kaleidoscope; and an "Escheresque level" full of optical illusions and based on several key illustrations from the artist M.C. Escher, including the famous waterfall castle staircase sketch.

Responding to constructive criticisms of Bug!'s design, Apour and Realtime Associates shrunk the size of the individual stages somewhat and added additional stages to each level as compensation—between four and six stages will now appear per level, in addition to some new mini bonus rounds. There will be "mini Atari-style levels," notes Apour, "with Centipede- and Joust-style stages, freefall parachuting stages where you grab things in mid-air...and American Gladiators-type stages where you fight in hamster balls" and re-enact the one-on-one staff battles. Bug Too! also allows you to run by tapping twice forward on the joypad, and excitingly uses a much-improved graphics engine to give the player a more thorough sense of 3-D. "We started from scratch," says Apour, as "the first engine was not flexible enough to do what we wanted to do...we wanted a lot more of a roller-coaster experience. As I've kept on saying throughout development, we want to make people puke." How will they do it? A chase camera will follow you in 3-D through Sonic-style loops.

Yet the best part of Bug Too! hasn't been mentioned yet: There are three different player characters to choose from including Bug! his bizarre little counterpart Maggot Dog (seen briefly in Bug!; uses his big ears to run and fly), and perhaps the most exciting new Sega character for 1996, Super Fly. With his shirt unbuttoned to his navel, complete with an afro, beatnik goatee, platform shoes, bell bottoms, Love Gun and a big gold chain, Super Fly is 100 percent funk and walks with a big ol' '70s stride. Music will be more jazzy and bass-filled than that in Bug!, with most of the audio generated by the Saturn's chipset.

SegaSoft's Bug Too! will be debuted at E³ and is intended for release on both the Saturn and Nvidia-equipped PCs, with the Saturn game launched eight weeks before the PC version.

NIGHTS

Previewed only for specific members of the gaming press, Sega Enterprises Ltd.'s Sonic Team has been working on "(Into the Dream Paradise with...) Nights," the company's first real attempt to marry arcade platform-style action with a dynamic moving camera, and the game which has served as a model for Sega Technical Institute (STI)'s development of the Saturn Sonic the Hedgehog title. Imagine a Mario 64-style 3-D world with a main character who looks sort of clown-like and wears a twin-tipped court jester's hat, and then remove gravity from the equation for many of the stages. Nights' graphics—which we can't show here because Sega isn't allowing photography yet—looks a lot like an evolved, flight-inclusive version of Knuckles' Chaotix, complete with plenty of glittering stars, flying through floating hoops and interesting geometric patterns on hills.

Nights has at least three separate gameplay interfaces, each of which utilizes 3-D: one allows you to walk around in a 3-D world in Super Mario 64 style, exploring and gathering objects; while another takes you on an "on rails" flight path through what is essentially a 2-D world (the camera movement here, in Panzer Dragoon-style freedom, is the 3-D 'excitement' for these stages); and the third gives you Panzer-style freedom of movement to attack Bosses. By grabbing 3-D objects, twirling yourself around them and then heaving them at enemies, you can eliminate some of the obstacles you face while flying through the levels. Overall, the look and feel of Nights is a lot like what Nintendo has attempted with Mario 64, but the gameplay appears—from our initial observations—to stay true to the Sega theory that the player isn't necessarily ready to be let loose in totally open 3-D worlds quite yet. How Sonic will fare in 3-D is open to your estimation...

SEGASOFT™

Close observers of the internal politics of Sega Enterprises Ltd. in Japan and Sega of America noticed tension beginning to develop some months ago when a directive from the Japanese company seemed, to some, like a parent punishing a wayward child. Sega Enterprises, home of Sega's famed Amusement Machines (AM) divisions, and thus the originator of Sega's entire line of successful arcade properties, was now presiding over the first period of Japanese success in its history of making home video game consoles. Virtua Fighter was helping to drive Japanese sales of Saturn hardware while VF2 was bringing gamers back into arcades; and for some odd reason, North American audiences just weren't lining up to play either of those titles in record numbers.

Sega Enterprises' concern was simple: The VF games were duplicating (if not exceeding) Street Fighter 2's success in Japan, and few people seemed to care about Virtua Fighter in North America. Depending on your perspective, Sega's problem could have had multiple causes: U.S. marketing might have been lax; other companies' titles (MK2/3) might have stolen some anticipated thunder in a different marketplace; distribution efforts could have been less successful, or perhaps gamers in both continents just

"It makes sense to develop for multiple platforms based on the economics."

— Steve Payne, SegaSoft senior vice president

saw the game differently. Sega Enterprises chose an interesting cause: Similar titles developed by Sega of America were supposedly cutting into sales of Sega's Japanese-developed titles; so according to theory, gamers waiting on Eternal Champions would otherwise have been lining up to play Virtua Fighter. From this concept of the problem, many of Sega's Japanese executives agreed that Sega of America should stop making software that would take sales away from Japanese-developed games.

▲ U.S. marketing dropping the ball for Virtua Fighter 2 is one possible cause for its slide.

At roughly the same time, Sega Enterprises' relatively low-profile Chairman, Mr. Akawa (also Chairman and CEO of Japan's CSK, the firm responsible for helping to back Sega President Hayao Nakayama's initial acquisition of the company years ago), was pondering a greater problem: Could Sega truly grow in a marketplace where console competition was so vicious and PC gaming was becoming increasingly

Annunziata and Stone's Three Dirty Dwarves

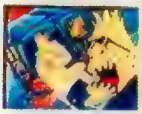
After working together on Ecco the Dolphin and Kolibri, two of Sega's more cerebral and lushly presented action titles, SegaSoft's Ed Annunziata has again joined with Laszlo Szenttornyai (pronounced Cen-torn-yay) and Kadosca Taffonyi of the Hungarian programming

house Novotrade. And this time, the winning team has been working to turn Annunziata's concept for Three Dirty Dwarves into an artistic reality.

Lead artist Bevin Stone designed the visual look of Three Dirty Dwarves, which is a combination of walk-and-fight action with tons of different one-shot play mechanics. "A lot of people had seen my storyboards and a lot of my designs," notes Stone, "and they asked me, 'why haven't you made a comic book?' I'd been kicking around the idea but I figured that [the comic] avenue has been heavily explored by the masses. [Games] seemed to be a less traveled route. Not many cartoonists get the chance to work in a team effort on this level."

Though he defines Three Dirty Dwarves as a "wide game, not a deep game," Annunziata explains that the three-player simultaneous game exposes you to tons of play mechanics that, in most games, "would be fun for five minutes and then you'd get bored of them. [In 3DD,] we have a lot of fighting combined with a lot of unique scenes that you get really quickly and then you move on to something else."

Annunziata's original story line gave Stone a number of creative concepts to play with. The military, under the command of the evil General Briggs, begins a genetic manipulation program to create the ultimate (huge and stupid) super soldier, failing miserably and instead producing four brilliant children who love to play role-playing games. Though Briggs tries to push the children to use their intellects to improve his genetics program, the kids go off and play their favorite RPG, Three Dirty Dwarves, and dream up a means to open a real portal between the dwarves' world and Earth. Before they fall into a sporting goods' store, the dwarves' armor is burnt off of their bodies as they plummet through the Earth's atmosphere, and thus they land in the midst of a variety of outfits and objects that strongly resemble medieval garb and weaponry.



After donning "armor" made from hockey and football gear, the dwarves pick up weapons to protect themselves in this harsh new world. The first dwarf, Gregg, picks up a sack of baseballs and grabs a bat. Taconic, the second dwarf, snags a bowling pin as a club and a shiny new bowling ball as a projectile. Corseg just grabs a shotgun. They leave the store and head into the Bronx, a place no doubt more dangerous than the world they left behind.

Using the Saturn's CD-ROM to continuously load new play mechanics into the game engine, Novotrade and Segasoft intend to keep you trying new things from stage to stage. As an example, Annunziata cites one scene where you fight on top of a huge wrecking ball and use the controller to sway the ball into and out of the screen in an effort to destroy a huge building–if you spent the whole game doing this, you'd be tired of the repetitive action, but as a one-time diversion from punching and kicking, it's fun and different.

In addition to allowing the developers to swap gameplay styles, the CD-ROM format also gave the designers a vast space for in-game artwork. Three Dirty

Like Yoshi's Island, 3DD derives its aesthetic from hand-drawn artwork.

popular? "For us to maximize profits, it makes sense to develop for multiple platforms based on the economics," explains SegaSoft Senior Vice President Steve Payne. "If we have a shot at a bigger software revenue stream, we may be able to justify putting some extra dollars into Saturn game development."

With plenty of venture capital and a new vision, Akawa-san conveniently carved off part of Sega of America for his own independent company, SegaSoft, and the result is this: One hundred of SoA's wildly creative product development people, who otherwise would have been largely stifled from developing American titles to compete with Japanese-bred games, now have a new shot at the software marketplace courtesy of the entrepreneurial Mr. Akawa. Using Disney–a company with famous characters whose global presences are not limited to a single medium (movies, games, coloring books, toys)—as a model, Akawa seeks to have his developers create content that is portable to multiple media; from games to films to comic books. "From a consumer standpoint, we want these to be the properties that people go to companies and say, 'hey, we want to see these guys in comic books, cartoons,'" says SegaSoft Executive Producer Michael Latham, "but [in designing content] we're not going to aim for the lowest common denominator."

"We have three primary goals," explains Latham. "First is making exciting and unusual content; second is connecting people to each other with new and exciting gaming experiences; and third is to create products that challenge gaming conventions...[at SegaSoft,] we're willing to take risks. We're willing to go after some key market opportunities that have just been left open." A large part of SegaSoft's future will be spent in the pursuit of all three goals simultaneously: The company will attempt to develop novel games for use with the Saturn Internet modem, PC modems and networks, and perhaps other person-to-person communications tools when they become available.

"We're looking to lead the market in this whole online experience," states Latham, noting that Akawa-san sees large potential for increasing player-to-player gaming. "We're looking for an audience that will be wider and greater [than before]. The real key is the upcoming cable modems, things that will make us forget all about networking. We'll all chuckle about it someday." For the moment, the company will be making sure that most of its games stress multiplayer and modem features and will prepare for an even more interactive future.

Chief on SegaSoft's 1996 agenda are two sets of projects: one collection being developed under contract for Sega of America (including Bug Too!, Mr. Bones and Congo), with a separate series of original games intended for publication by SegaSoft itself. Three Dirty Dwarves (see sidebar) will most likely be SegaSoft's first self-published title, released initially across two platforms (Saturn and PC) with full modem compatibility planned for each. Their second title, The Sacred Pools, (formerly code-named Amazonia) has been described by SegaSoft's Payne as "a pretty ambitious graphic adventure game...with more interaction than your standard graphic adventure." The rumormill buzz on Sacred Pools: an entirely new approach to the burnt-out FMV game category, developed by people loathsome of standard FMV software. Roach Racers, their third game, will be a network-based racing game with what Payne terms "some unique characters;" rumor has it that the game is a tongue-in-cheek parody of driving games in general and Ridge Racer in specific.

While SegaSoft will now be aggressively developing content for the Saturn, PC and Mac platforms—with other console machines likely to follow, though PlayStation and N64 licenses have not yet been obtained—a second part of their business, a 'peripheral division' headed by Exec VP and Chief Operating Officer Gary Griffiths, will focus on exploring "new business opportunities, new corporate alliances and Internet-related services that may or may not be consumer products," according to Payne, and may well become involved in filling market niches not satisfied by larger companies. "If we [were to become] frustrated because the market isn't growing fast enough," says Latham, "potentially we could do that [fill the niche] ourselves."

Such niches could exist in both hardware and software markets, and as Sega of America won't be as aggressive in "competing" with Sega Enterprises to create certain types of games, SegaSoft may find themselves creating some of the genres' leading titles. How about a new Eternal Champions game? "If we wanted to take [EC] in new directions," notes Payne, "we would need to negotiate that with Sega." At least it's a possibility now...

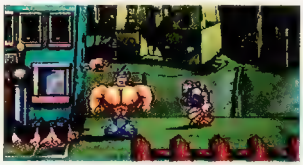
Sega and Matsushita: The Plan Revealed

As reported previously in *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION*, Sega and Matsushita have been speaking for months regarding Sega's use of Matsushita's M2 chipset technology, and Sega of America representatives are now beginning to admit that the two companies will work together on a new machine: Matsushita's DVD console, which will include a M2 chipset at the core...and Sega hints that there might well be something else in there. What is that supposed to mean to the average consumer? While Matsushita and 3DO have proudly talked about the DVD's use of the M2 chipset for core system technology, Sega is not officially closing any doors to superior graphic technologies at this time, should they become available. The M2 could, in a Sega-driven DVD console, be used solely as logic, audio or back-up math processors for a stronger graphics chip.

Of note is the fact that Sega maintains on an unofficial level that plans for "Eclipse," the CD and cartridge-based developers' wish list of 64-Bit hardware features, have not been dropped yet in favor of the DVD console, and that although some of Sega's official statements (that they will back the machine for "at least the next two years" beginning in 1996) have served to distance the company somewhat from the Saturn. The company appears to be developing plenty of 1996 and 1997 software for the machine. In other words, the DVD-based console is a pipe dream at the moment with no concrete graphics or audio specifications, and though Sega intends to work with Matsushita on the machine, they do not want to give the average (confused) buyer the wrong impression by discussing vague information too early in the game.

Dwarves' art is "completely handmade," says Annunziata, "and that's the first bullet on the back of the box." Rather than storing and repeating background tiles from the Saturn's RAM, Novotrade is using the RAM as a buffer to continually fill the screen with new graphics data loaded from the CD, such that even though "the whole game takes place in the Bronx, every building is a unique building." The Saturn's zooming and scaling hardware allows the camera to move in and out as you brawl, but the main visual glitz in 3DD is the continually changing background data.

▼ Lead artist Bevin Stone sits amidst an office cluttered with 3DD artwork and storyboards.



▲ Could a unique cartoon fighter be the next hit for SegaSoft? Some critics are skeptical.

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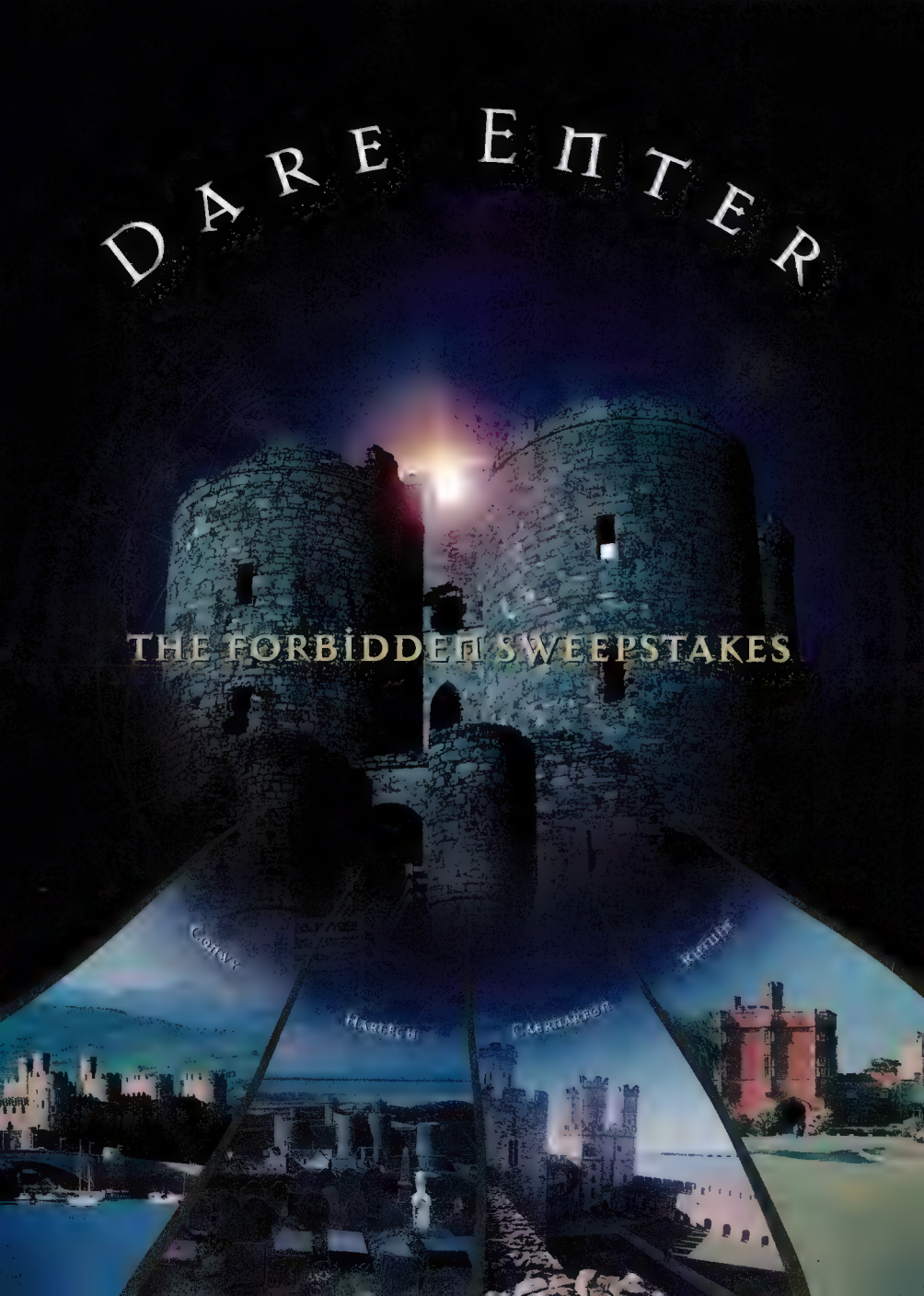
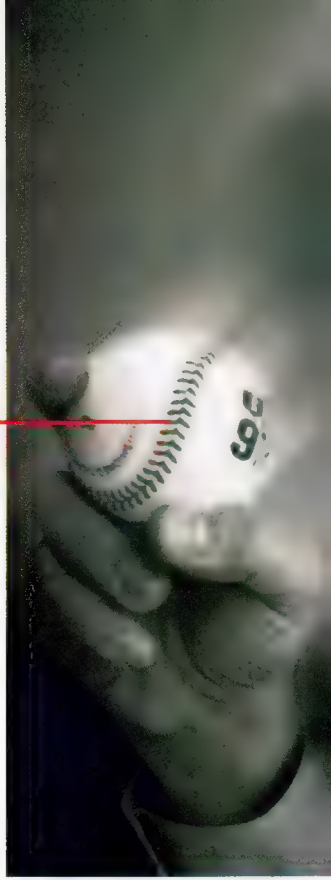
THE FORBIDDEN SWEEPSTAKES



Andrew Donchak, Konami America's Consumer Division President talks to IG's FUSION about the company's new outlook, line of successful 32-Bit sports games, and big surprises coming at E³...

PITCHING KONAMI



IG: Tell us about your responsibilities at Konami.

Andy: As President of Konami's consumer division, I'm working with the Konami (America) people who are involved in planning, sales, and licensing, among others to help facilitate the process of getting product to the marketplace. We have development teams in Tokyo, and here at Konami Computer Entertainment Chicago [KCEC], and we use outside developers. I'm coordinating the process to get product out of development and into the hands of the consumer.

IG: In the past, Konami has done much of its development in Japan, and today, there's a lot of development happening in the United States. Can you tell us anything about this change in focus?

Andy: It's a situation where we are augmenting or complementing the capabilities we have in Japan. The idea is to provide the marketplace with a fuller range of product–particularly the American marketplace. We'll be able to deliver better product that is more appropriate for the American market. There's a larger development community now than there was 10 years ago, when Konami started, that we can draw on in the States as other companies have, and deliver very good product that is generated in the States.

IG: Konami previously has held big cartoon licenses, such as the X-Men arcade game, the huge hit TMNT titles, Tiny Toons and Animaniacs. Are we seeing fewer licensed properties from Konami today?

Andy: I think you're probably seeing different properties, not less. For example, in calendar year 1995, we acquired a number of sports licenses. MLBPA for baseball, NBA for basketball, NFL and NFLPA for football, and several others that we have or are in discussions about, as part of the process of creating Konami's Sports Series. We have retained a number of other licenses from, for example, Warner Bros., like Animaniacs and Pinky and the Brain, which we are doing, and you will continue to see those kinds of properties coming from Konami. Ninety-five was a year of transition for everybody. The 16-Bit market, which also tends to be a bit younger, was declining, while the 32-Bit market, which we projected to be a little bit older, was coming on stream. As we go forward, that will even out and you will see more of those other kinds of products from us in the future. So I don't think there are fewer licenses, but rather a broader spectrum of licenses from Konami.

IG: Sports games appear to be a major focus for Konami now. Can you tell us about your forthcoming hockey and football titles?

Andy: We have a number of sports games under development now, across all the major sports and some of the not-so-major sports. At the end of the year we expect to have a very full complement of eight or 10 different sport genres. It came about very simply; a review of the consumer data showed that sports are a big part of the business and a very large percentage of the total games sold. Konami's intent is to be a full-line supplier of high-quality games across all genres. It was imperative that we were represented in the sports genre, and we thought "if we're going to do it, we're going to do it in a big way and let people know that we are serious about it," which led to the establishment of the Konami Sports Series line.
We have a team here working on our baseball game, Bottom of the Ninth, and we're using an outside developer on our football game. We have not yet determined where we're going to do the hockey game. NBA In the Zone was done in Japan. Our golf game is being developed in Japan, Track and Field [aka Hyper Olympics in Atlanta] is being done in Japan.

> **"I think it will come down to just one or two winners in the platform area, and there will be a high degree of standardization."** — Andrew Donchak

IG: Tell us about Project Overkill.

Andy: It's going to be hot. It is a very extensive game, with maybe 50 levels, and it is...non-linear, which means you have free-form ability to move in the environment. It's very bloody, and very violent, which is part of what that genre is about. It's futuristic mercenaries on a mission. There is a high degree of flexibility on being able to choose weapons and things like that. We're very excited about it, and we have high expectations for it. Project Overkill was developed here, at KCEC.

IG: Can you tell me what platforms Konami will be developing for in the next few years?

Andy: Obviously the platforms that are on the table today, that everyone including us thinks are viable, are the PlayStation and Saturn. At the same time, the PC CD-ROM business is something that we were in and we're coming back to in a very major way. There's a lot of noise, a lot of buzz about the Nintendo 64 and the M2 technology, and we'll be keeping a close eye on that.

IG: About the PC CD-ROM market, can you tell me what titles you are planning to develop or port for that platform?

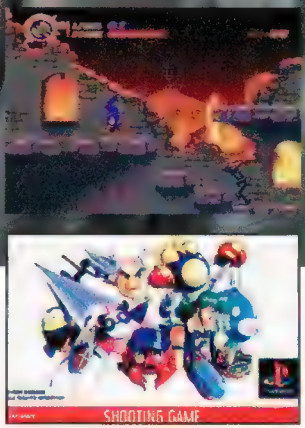
Andy: We're actually going to do both; we're going to do titles exclusively for the PC CD-ROM market because it is uniquely suited for certain kinds of genres. We'll also be doing some ports where it's appropriate, and we'll be doing distribution for other third-party titles.

IG: A lot of Japanese-themed Konami games have appeared at U.S. trade shows, including Parodius, and we're wondering what happened to them. Are they on hold for U.S. release?

Andy: We are constantly looking at the marketplace viability of the title, which is the number that we think we can sell, and what it costs to actually bring it here. In most cases, you can't simply pick up a game and just bring it here—there are conversions, translations, adaptations and other things that need to be done. Very simply, it's a cost-benefit trade-off in terms of the cost to do it against how many we think we can sell. Also, what else we could do with our resources, and what else we can do with that same unit of resource in terms of generating sales? In some cases, those titles don't always rise to the top of the list right away; but if we think that there's a title we can viably sell, we'll bring it to the marketplace.

IG: How has the relationship between the company here and the company in Japan changed, if at all? Do you have more autonomy now?

Andy: What I see now is a much tighter integration and link, let's say communication, between what's happening in the marketplace in the United States, and the feedback from here to Japan; which provides much closer coordination between what comes from our R&D teams, and what we're going to bring to the marketplace. Our planning and development process brings all of our sales and marketing people together with all of our development people in a forum that allows us to provide feedback to each other as part of our process to bring games to market. To a large extent, what you see with Konami is much more attentiveness to what the marketplace desires, and our efforts to create specifically for the American market instead of simply bringing games from Japan.



▲ **The PlayStation and Saturn will be seeing a new Castlevania adventure soon (SNES version pictured) while Parodius appears to be in limbo.**

"It was imperative that we were represented in the sports genre, and we thought, 'If we were going to do it, we were going to do it in a big way.'"

IG: A lot of companies have been bringing back older games in the form of multiple games on one disc. Konami of Japan has been doing some of that, with the Parodius Deluxe Pack, the Twinbee Deluxe Pack, and the recently released Gradius Deluxe Pack. Is Konami planning on doing that with other classic games?

Andy: We've got a couple of things we're looking at, although it's premature to comment on them. It goes back to what we were talking about earlier, in terms of the cost-benefit trade-off, what it costs to bring them together, put them on a new platform, and how many of them we think we can sell. But we are actually looking at that for a couple of titles right now.

▲ **Konami's Goal Storm was brought over from Japan, where it was called J. League Winning 11.**

IG: There's a new Castlevania game in development (for the Saturn and PlayStation)?

Andy: We're going to officially announce it at E³. We're very excited about it. It looks really good, and we expect it to continue the tradition of the Castlevania line, which, as you know, is very popular and very successful.

IG: Can you tell us anything about your PlayStation and Saturn 3-D one-on-one fighter Kumite?

Andy: It's a fighting game and we're very enthused about it. We'll be making a major announcement at E³ about that as well. Coincidentally, we were just looking at the packaging, and it's pretty cool.

IG: And we hear there is a Contra game in development?

Andy: That also is true, and it's another game we're very excited about, for PlayStation and Saturn. It's looking just fantastic; and there are some interesting features that we're going to announce at E³ about how the game is played.

IG: So it's not going to be a straight 2-D game, then?

Andy: No.

IG: What would you like to see Konami do in the coming years that it hasn't done previously?

Andy: We haven't announced it yet, but we are planning a Konami Kids children's line that makes use of those types of licenses we had, like Batman, Tiny Toons and Animaniacs...we think it's a viable franchise as well, and Konami has a great history in that area...One of the other things we're thinking about doing is going after the RPG market. We're taking a hard look at that.

IG: How do you see the market changing in the next five years?

Andy: I think it's going to be a crap shoot and, frankly, I don't think you can predict. Personally, I think that there are too many hardware systems, and that you'll see a consolidation of the number of platforms. At one count, there were over 20 different individual platforms. At some point in time, the consumer, as well as development companies like Konami say, "Wait a minute, we're just not going to try to deal with all that. Let's pick the one or two that are the most viable," and the rest will fall by the wayside. I think it will come down to just one or two winners in the platform area, and there will be a high degree of standardization. I think the number of developers will consolidate, there are too many of those.

IG: So you don't have any opinion or comment on which platforms you think will be the big winners?

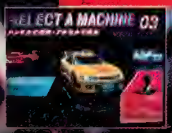
Andy: Personally, I think it would be guesswork. The rate of change of technology is increasing. What might be true today would be completely different a month from now because of something that happens with technology...Our challenge, and our task, is simply to be flexible enough to be able to develop for whatever platform the consumer is endorsing with their dollars at retail, and be a provider of high-quality, good-playing games.

IG: How do you feel about Nintendo going with cartridges with the Nintendo 64? Do you think it will be so powerful that people will develop for it regardless of the risk?

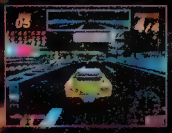
Andy: I don't think we've heard the final chapter on all aspects of the storage and delivery media for the Nintendo 64. The early perceptions people have about it being solely a cartridge-based system and therefore having certain limitations as a function of that delivery medium, are going to change as Nintendo continues to announce what that system will be capable of doing. [Nintendo] indicated that they will announce at E³...their external storage medium. That substantially changes your perception of what that machinery will do, just from that one little difference. If we think we can sell a lot of games for it, we're going to develop for it. It's as simple as that.

MIDNIGHT RUN

IG Editors (and avid driving game enthusiasts) Jer Horwitz and Lee Saito were recently invited to Konami's headquarters in Buffalo Grove, Ill., to sit down for an extended session with the company's latest fantasy racing simulation, Midnight Run. Having spent the previous week overloading on every arcade racer from Daytona USA to Rave Racer to Sega Rally to Manx T.T. Super Bike and Indy 500, they were primed to see any little flaw that might have appeared in Konami's racer... but they came away wanting more.



If you can't find Midnight Run locally, it's time to ask your arcade's manager what his bosses were thinking: Konami's latest arcade game is a mix of the best elements from Namco's Ridge Racer and Electronic Arts' Need for Speed–you get to race at extremely high speeds through dense textured-polygon traffic and city streets. Billed as a sequel to Road Fighter, a Konami game that came out nearly 10 years ago, Midnight Run is the company's very successful attempt to break into the crowded 3-D polygon racing game genre.



Thankfully, Midnight Run doesn't even vaguely resemble its predecessor. Powered by a Konami proprietary 3-D chipset with a PowerPC 603 CPU at its heart–not Matsushita's M2–Midnight Run features very high-end graphics, with the exception of one effect: anti-aliasing, which will definitely be a feature on future revisions of the board. The board is roughly comparable to Sega's Model 2 in polygon generation, and does true perspective correction and lighting effects as well.

The object of the game, of course, is to finish first. Midnight Run takes place on the highways of Tokyo in the near future, with everything from tractor-trailers to motorcyclists trying to occupy the same space you are. At the beginning of the race, you can pick from four different cars, with the three unselected cars becoming your computer opponents. (The game does support up to four-way networking, so the other cars could also be human opponents if your location is fortunate enough to have multiple machines.) One unique feature of the game is the ability to change not only your viewpoint, but your transmission in the middle of the race, allowing people to cruise with an automatic transmission, but still letting them use the manual transmission for extra power after recovering from a collision.

What's truly unique about Midnight Run's design is the fact that two completely different types of racing game fans can sit down in the driver's seat and play the game in entirely different ways. MR allows you to select either an Out Run-style version of your car which keeps you mostly on rails, automatically eased through turns and cushioned a bit from the harshness of real driving. If you're more of a hardcore driving game fan (or someone bored of the Out Run driving model), you can choose a tuned version of the same car, which has different handling characteristics and peppier acceleration. The tuned car handles more like the car in Ridge Racer, as the tires tend to break loose in turns. If you can control the skid, this is a very good way to cut people off. If not, then you will find yourself eating concrete...

There are three tracks in the game, some of which feature shortcuts that have much harder turns to negotiate. The shortcuts don't have any traffic on them, though, so if you manage to stay off the walls, you can usually pick up some time on the competition.

Another neat feature: Pace cars. The concept here is simple but effective–during the race, you see an ever-present on-track image of a driver who has taken the course, and if you can stay in front of that driver, you're the winner. One pace car is a black Porsche, which represents the track's current record completion time. The other pace car is a white Mercedes convertible, which represents the slowest time you can run and still finish the race. Riding in the Mercedes are a pair of polygon babes who take time out to taunt you if you're doing poorly. ("Why are you last? Are you driving Miss Daisy?")

Audio is realistic and backed by an in-cabinet 3-D stereo Spatializer system (see Buzz Word, *IG's FUSION* issue 9) which eliminates simple distinctions between left and right channels in favor of a smoother surrounding flow of sound. As has always been the case with Konami's 16-Bit and better arcade titles, the music is upbeat and the audio samples are of high enough quality to appear on a game music CD without remixing and editing.

Unfortunately, Konami says that the game will be in very limited release, possibly only hitting a handful of arcades across the country, a fact attributed to the deluxe Japanese-style cabinet; which has the shifting column on the left side. It's a pity, too, since this is the game that many gamers have been waiting for–consider this a preview of what you can expect to eventually see as a superb home racing game.

Independent game developers and movie stunt men live by similar codes. In the movies, stunt men get bruised trying to make exciting scenes for which only actors are praised. In the video game world, some of the best games are made by independent developers, then published by larger companies. During the 8-Bit era, Rare Ltd., the company now famous for hits like Donkey Kong Country and Killer Instinct, developed over 60 cartridges. They created Marble Madness for Milton Bradley, Wrestlemania for Acclaim and RC ProAm for Nintendo.

Sega of America has benefited from hiring outside developers. Most of the gaming world has acknowledged Sega as one of the best companies in the world at making sports games. With hits like Joe Montana Football, World Series Baseball and College Football's National Championship, Sega has demonstrated a deep understanding of sports games. There's only one problem, though. While Sega published all of these games, BlueSky, a small independent developer in San Diego, Calif., actually wrote them.

UNKNOWN BUT

KGB FILES

Though BlueSky has several sports titles under development, their most exciting project is an action-adventure title, The KGB Files, slated for release in early 1997. While the game is too early in its development to be judged on play value, its cinematic story line and first-rate graphics already stand out.

The KGB Files starts out borrowing from current events, then exaggerates everything until it creates a world of its own. The game is framed with an introduction in which reporter Peter Rykoff goes to Moscow to see recently opened KGB documents. Though Peter Rykoff is a fictitious character, it is true that the new government of Russia has opened old KGB materials to the public. The opening of old documents is where reality ends and the exaggerations begin.

Rykoff stumbles across files containing information about a Soviet agent known simply as Ivan who was dropped behind enemy lines during World War II. As much as he may want to stop and smell the wienerschnitzel, Ivan is constantly on the run. He has eight missions, each based partially on true incidents of World War II trivia and largely fictionalized.

Ivan's missions include breaking into a secret Nazi rocket factory on a remote island, attacking a zeppelin launch, helping American prisoners escape a German P.O.W. camp, stealing and sampling experimental jet packs created by Nazi scientists, hitching a ride on a top-secret super-submarine and uncovering trainloads of stolen

art treasures.

Each mission will have six to 20 unique stages. "We wanted the players to see something new every 10 minutes of the game," says Dana Christianson, creative director/project director of The KGB Files. "The idea was to keep them guessing what was coming up next."

Christianson, who has been in the industry since 1983, threw every technology he could find into making The KGB Files a full sensory experience. The backgrounds have been created with a proprietary texture-mapping technique called skins. While BlueSky was able to demonstrate some beautiful backgrounds and great animations, the backgrounds have not yet been applied to the animations, so there is no way of verifying that the end result will be as attractive as the components themselves.

An even more exciting use of technology is BlueSky's use of motion-capture technology in the creation of Ivan. Running, shooting and falling, Ivan is possibly the most realistic adventure game character ever to reach the silicon screen. "Usually artists use equipment to cover up their characters' joints," points out Christianson. Ivan's arms and legs are fully visible and move as realistically as if they'd been photographed.

Christianson gladly demonstrates scenes of Ivan running past a row of tanks to show the quality

of his team's work. As Ivan runs, equipment such as a rope that is strapped to his belt swing with his body. Except for his face, which is not yet finished, Ivan looks more like a human than an animation.

"We have 18 minutes of computer animations that we're submitting to be shown at animation festivals," boasts Christianson. "It's not just the animation. Sound and music are two of the most important elements for tying emotion to a game. We've spent a lot of time getting on sound and music as well."

One area that has hampered their progress is lip-sync technology. When you've invested time and money making characters as real as possible, you don't want them to talk like cartoons.

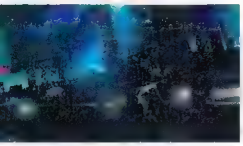
"We've looked into three technologies," says Christianson. "We've tried sequence mapping video over polygons and morphing targets. We're currently looking into facial motion capture."

Sports titles are not the only Genesis games that **BlueSky** has created for Sega. BlueSky also created Spider-man: Web of Fear (for the 32X), Desert Demolition, Jurassic Park and Jurassic Park Rampage Edition. Even Vectorman, 1995's best-selling Genesis game, was developed by the nameless-faceless folks at BlueSky.

OT UNHEARD OF

ASSASSIN

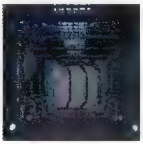
Assassin, a game which will be released for the PC, PSX and Saturn this fall, is a bit less inventive though no less ambitious than KGB Files Though the game is admittedly a Doom-alike at first blush, the team designing the game has created some new touches and addressed personal dislikes.



The story behind Assassin is minimal enough to fit most Doom games. Jack Butcher, a government agent, has been dispatched to break into Microcom, a futuristic high technology company, to stop its CEO from trying to take over the world as well as the market Jack's job is to change the man's mind by shooting a bullet through it. Unfortunately, Jack gets discovered before completing the job and must escape an army of robots and mechanized foes. In Doom-style worlds, there's always some excuse for shooting everything that moves.

The innovation in this game comes in two areas. First of all, the graphics are smooth and attractive. Rather than the blurry inpixelated settings of Doom and Dark Forces, Assassin has a smooth, textured look. With the exception of Creature Shock, a great-looking game in need of a big dose of adrenaline, this is the best-looking Doom so far.

Chuck Osieja, studio chief for Assassin, and head designer Matt McDonald, decided to make their game available to the widest possible audience by creating high and low resolution settings. In high resolution, Assassin's futuristic settings look fairly realistic. The dark halls and assembly areas are not nearly as photo-realistic as scenes in games like Myst, but they don't need to be. You don't dawdle in Assassin; after all, there's a horde of angry robots behind you.



Even in low resolution mode, Assassin looks good. There's a grainy artistic quality. The look is far from realistic, but the true 3-D quality of the environment is still evident, and the game still looks better than other Dooms.

BlueSky's motion-capture studio may be the busiest studio in the industry. All of the bad guys and robots in Assassin were created using this technology, including a chicken-legged robot based on the renegade robot in Robo Cop.

One of the benefits of this level of graphics is that the cut-away scenes and the game itself have the same look. "It's jolting when the cut scenes look better than the game itself," says Osieja. "In Assassin, everything is the same, the game and the cinemas."

That's important because another of Osieja's pet peeves about Doom games is that when creatures are shot, they always die in the same manner. "Blam!, then a blob of goop on the ground. After the first time, what's the big deal?"

In Assassin, the game cuts to an AVI when creatures are shot Though most will die in a similar fashion, the final creature in every series has a unique death sequence

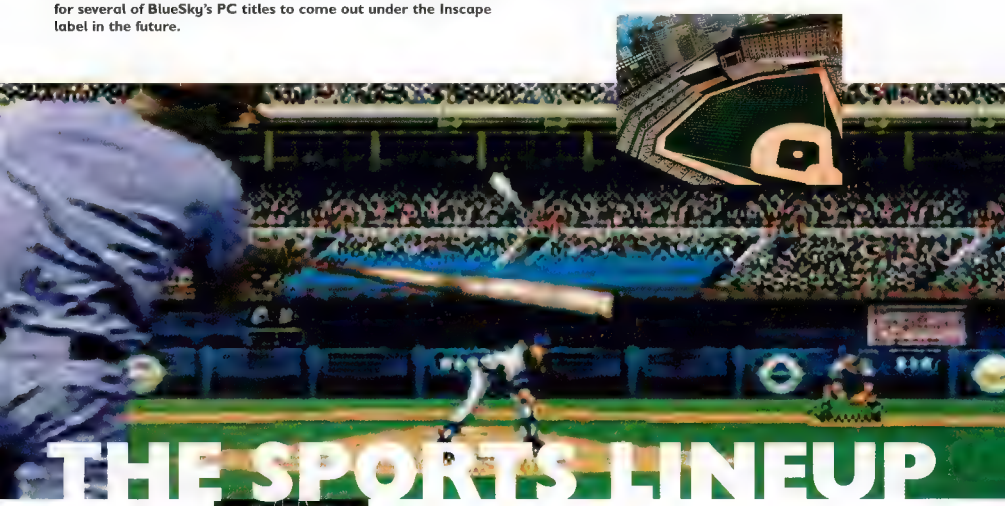
Perhaps the biggest risk Osieja and McDonald are taking is including automated help. Feeling that players may get bored trying to find their way out of mazes, they have included automated helpers. Once players have killed off their enemies, the game monitors how long they are taking to find their way to the next level. If they take too long, on-screen hints help them progress. This feature is risky because many players may not share this frustration and may resent being pushed along.

Amazingly, after the publication of Vectorman, Sega and BlueSky have had a parting of ways. What this means is that while BlueSky does not deserve credit for the attractive Saturn version of World Series Baseball, the company cannot be blamed for Sega's astonishingly unattractive NHL All-Star Hockey.

This does not mean that Sega and BlueSky will have no dealings in the future. Sega still owns 10 percent of the developer, and work is already under way for a sequel to the 300,000-unit selling Vectorman. A more active partner, however, is Inscape, formerly known as WarnerActive, which owns 20 percent of BlueSky. Look for several of BlueSky's PC titles to come out under the Inscape label in the future.

As far as BlueSky is concerned, the separation with Sega has come at an opportune junction. Not only is the developer ready to unveil a new generation of sports simulations published through a new partner, it has also created two ambitious adventure games.

Even with these new sports and adventure games, BlueSky will not develop a direct following. If the sports games sell well, Data East will receive the accolades. Inscape will most likely receive the credit for KGB Files and Assassin. BlueSky may never strike out on its own as a publishing house, but it has created some very famous programs.



THE SPORTS LINEUP

If any company stands to benefit from BlueSky's divorce with Sega, it is Data East. The once proud maker of such arcade wonders as Karate Champ, Karnov, and BurgerTime, Data East has not fared well in the home console market with many of its most recent titles. Nonetheless, Data East Japan has allowed great latitude to its American operation, which saw a unique opportunity in building a partnership with BlueSky. The result will be the MVP line of sports games.

Of course Data East isn't the only company challenging EA Sports' lock on the sports category this year. Interplay has just created its new VR Sports line, Spectrum HoloByte has teamed up with ABC Television to launch a new sports line, Virgin Interactive has new hockey and baseball games, Psygnosis has a hot new soccer title, and the list goes on seemingly endlessly.

How do BlueSky and Data East hope to compete with the sports-simulation market becoming hotter than ever before? By offering the most realistic gameplay with fantasy league elements to create added value, says Mike Meyers of Data East.

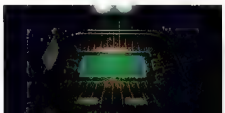
"We've got an MLBPA (Major League Baseball Players Association) license, [but] everybody has an MLBPA license; I don't know anybody who doesn't have an MLBPA license. Something that everybody else also does is you play your season, you go through the playoffs, and then you play the World Series. We think it's time to take it to the next step and give players a little more value for their money."

"What we want to do is make their gameplay ongoing. We want to give them an incentive to play second and third seasons. We have added a lot of the fantasy elements to our game. We have a genuine fantasy draft in which all the players get dumped into a free agent pool and you draft a full roster. You take your team and play the season and win credit based on winning and doing things well. When you get into the pennant drive, you can then trade a cheaper player for a more expensive player if you have the money to make up the difference."

Meyers readily admits that this kind of fantasy league realism has its roots back in an old SNK game for the Nintendo Entertainment system called Baseball Stars. "That's the only game that's really ever done it on a platform basis. If you talk to people who have played video games for over seven years, that game always comes up."

To distinguish themselves from such competitors as Accolade, Sony, EA Sports, VR Sports, Digital Pictures, Spectrum HoloByte, and the rest of the video game producing universe, Data East and BlueSky have decided to make a college football game instead of a game based on the NFL.

Data East's MVP College Football should take this merging of fantasy leagues and realistic sports to a new level. The game includes all 110 colleges in the NCAA. Each college's playbook and style of play will be based on real life, so don't expect lots of passing plays from Notre Dame or heavy running from the Brigham Young University Cougars.



You play this game partially through the eyes of your university's athletic director, meaning you have to fire and hire coaches, recruit new students, set up a four-year program, and guard your team against NFL recruiters who wish to poach your star players.

According to Bob Horn, who played for the San Francisco 49ers and San Diego Chargers, the gameplay and fantasy elements of this game are in tune with the real game. Now working for BlueSky, Horn has assembled thousands of plays for this game. "There are a wide spectrum of plays that are extremely accurate," says Horn.

The longest wait is the one for death.
The biggest Mortal yet is coming to Sega Saturn.

ULTIMATE

3™

MORTAL KOMBAT

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SEGA SATURN

Williams

SEGA

ULTIM

Origin Mixes Modems With Their Classic RPG

By Peter Bartholow

There may have been electronic role-playing games before Richard Garriott released his classic computer game Ultima, but there's no question that RPGs were never the same afterward. Through multiple sequels, each of which has increased the series in overall depth and complexity, Ultima's complex medieval fantasy worlds have entranced hundreds of thousands of individual players around the world.

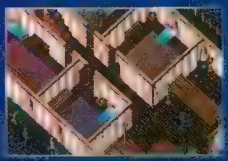
Today, multiplayer games have taken hold of the PC market, though some online gaming services have made strides to bring RPGs online with multiplayer features, none had the richness and detail associated with the Ultima series. With new technology Origin has started to take its seminal property in new directions with what could be their biggest project to date: Ultima Online.

Under the tutelage of Starr Long and Richard Garriott, Ultima Online has grown to massive proportions and will, by Origin's description, be the largest online "universe" in existence. In fact, the world will be larger than Ultimas one through nine combined in terms of land area, and Ultima Online's world will be deeper, more dynamic and more involving than all of those titles put together.

Ultima Online's universe consists of four primary continents: The long-time home of the Ultima series, Britannia, returns, alongside other old and new continents including the Dark Unknown, the Lands of Danger and Despair and the Lands of the Feudal Lords. Ultima Online will be a completely "real" world, featuring a functioning economic model, random occurrences, and unlimited questing opportunities procedurally generated from prefabricated quest fragments. The single concept most worth bearing in mind, however, is the fact that you will not be alone on this huge new map: Other budding warriors will be living out their quests and coming into contact—if not conflict—with you.

Take, for example, the inevitable act of murder by one player character against a non-player character. That victim will have relatives seeking revenge, and talking to one of them will inevitably send you on a quest to apprehend the killer, and upon returning successfully you will be endowed with a reward of some type. The other townspeople will know of the killing, talk about it, and even provide clues to who the murderer was to help the player get on his way. This level of world awareness within the game will carry over to a larger scale, as well: Droughts, pirate activity, and random dragon attacks will all wind their way into this new Ultima universe.

Technology will not be left behind, however. Ultima Online's graphics will be bitmap-based, unlike the 3-D world art appearing in Ultima IX, but will have a distinctively 3-D look similar to that in Ultima VIII, now with a steeper viewing angle to keep people and items from disappearing behind walls. Light-sourcing will make possible both dimly lit alleys and day and night cycles, while an advanced paper-dolling scheme will keep every player's character distinctive from others. Featuring 16-Bit color graphics in full-screen 640x480 resolution, Ultima Online will push PCs visually above anything currently available in similar RPGs, online or otherwise.



▲ Richard Garriott's Ultima series has grown up in more ways than one. Multima is expected to break multiplayer adventure gaming wide open.

As far as the story goes, Ultima Online takes place on an alternate version of Britannia where none of the previous games have occurred. As a result, players will not wander under the dark cloud of the Guardian, but old favorites such as Mondain and Minax could make appearances.

Ultima Online begins testing on or around March 25, and will limit the approximately 3200 player/testers to the city of Britain. With around nine more months of development to go, Ultima Online is concentrated potential more than anything else, and IG will be sure to keep our readers updated on its progress.

◀ Richard Garriott (front) with the Ultima Online Team

A's Global Village

Recently, Intelligent Gamer sat down with Starr Long, Ultima Online's associate producer, and asked him a few questions regarding his most recent product.

IG: What were your goals in establishing and maintaining Ultima Online's enormous world?

Starr: Basically, we wanted to support thousands of people simultaneously. The reason I started working on a multiplayer game in the first place is that it's just impossible to get the interaction out of a machine that you can get out of a human. Even the most complex AI routines could never simulate that level of unpredictability. Ultima's always been the perfect vehicle for a multiplayer game. The world will be comprised of four continents, each of which will have their own cultures, social schemes and even magic practices. Each continent will have five to 10 cities. We want a dynamic, changing world that's constantly changing around the player, constantly providing new things for the player to do.

IG: Define "thousands of players?"

Starr: Two thousand players online simultaneously, when we go online around Christmas. If we have a larger demand than that, we'll look into expanding. While that sounds small, that's 2000 people at one time. At any given moment, the online services have an average of 10 percent of their users on at once, which really gives us a capacity for around 20,000 players, total. We also have the capability to add to the landmass as well, which I don't see something that would happen much in the near future, as we can support between one and two thousand people on each continent.

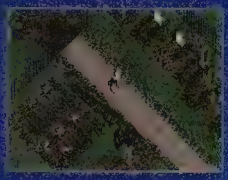
IG: What role will non-player and player characters take in this world?

Starr: Player characters can take any role they want. If a player wants to be a baker, the player can be a baker. Most players will opt to take the traditional, hack-and-slash, dungeon-delving adventurer role, but that's not the only option. I myself would be interested in becoming a pirate to pester other ships. Players can play any role they want within the game's context. NPCs, for the most part, will be Origin's representatives online. We'll be guards to keep people from killing each other all the time, the shopkeepers to sell supplies, assuming another player doesn't fill that role. There will also be the characters that players know and love, such as Lord British and Iolo, which will switch between being non-player characters and player characters. For instance, Richard Garriott will play as Lord British, but when he's not, it'll be an NPC.

> **"We want a dynamic, changing world that's constantly changing around the player, constantly providing new things for the player to do."**
>
> **—Starr Long Associate Producer, Ultima Online**

IG: Will players be able to expand on the world, such as building houses, opening their own stores, and the like?

Starr: Players won't be able to expand on the world in the sense of laying down new land, and all



▲ Demo versions of the game as well as full game CDs will be made available through software stores and the Internet.

building will be done within the game's context. If a player amasses enough money, and it will take quite a bit of money, they can build themselves a house. They'll have to go to the architect's guild and define what kind of house is it that they'd want to build, buy the land from the farmer or whoever owns it at the time, and then furnish it with things bought in town. Opening a shop will be similar. If someone kills the baker, you can fill his role. The player would approach the city council and ask if he can reopen the bakery.

IG: To what degree will cooperation be emphasized?

Starr: Cooperation will be stressed, to be sure. For example, players will want to have a companion when they travel in the event that they die so that their friend can take them back to a shrine to be resurrected or to protect the body from thieves while the ghost tries to find someone. Also, we plan on integrating a number of puzzles in the game that require multiple people to complete. Ships will require multiple players to operate, which means that a player could get a bunch of his friends together or hire NPCs.

IG: How will quests be integrated into Ultima Online?

Starr: A lot of the quests will be self-generated, and be resultant from changes in the world, as we discussed earlier. There will also be more elaborate quests that will be scripted by people on the Ultima Online team, but even those will have elements that change within them. We're also talking about having contests, too. We may say "First person to destroy the Tetrahedron generator at the bottom of this dungeon wins 10 free hours," or something like that to spur competition.

IG: The game is a Windows '95 product. Why was this decision made?

Starr: We have a number of reasons for making that decision. Memory management was one of the primary factors, as Win95 has better management built in than just about anything you can do in DOS. DirectDraw was another factor, which allowed us to work in full-screen at 16-Bit color and still get good framerates. Win95 also makes sense because it's 32-Bit and of its installed user base.

IG: What similarities to online services did you want to keep in Ultima Online?

Starr: All of the standard online service functions will be available, but within the game's context. To send a message, players will hire a messenger or cast a spell, perhaps.

IG: You mentioned that completion of a contest or a quest could result in 10 free hours given to the player. What sort of payment option are we looking at here?

Starr: We want to have two payment methods: an hourly rate and a flat, unlimited rate. We want to keep the charges low so long-term play will be affordable. We've even talked about a sliding hourly scale, which would mean that everyone starts at a certain rate and the more hours they log, the less each hour will cost.

IG: Will players ever be able to add onto the world themselves?

Starr: In the early stages, we did talk about giving out editors and letting players expand the world themselves, but you get into an issue of quality with that. If people were that good at creating worlds, then they'd be working for us or another company. We don't want our world (that we spent a lot of time making) next to someone else's.

IG: "Beavis Island?"

Starr: (laughing) Exactly... something that they threw together in under an hour. We thought about providing top customers with editors and letting them submit ideas and areas, or even having area-designing contests. They'd get credit of course, but we don't think people will want to spend that much time world-building, and if they do, they should come interview with us.

The A.O.U. Show

IG Foreign Correspondent Akira Kishimoto brings another IG report from the heart of Tokyo, Japan.

Held at Makuhari Messe in Japan from Feb. 21 to 22, Japan's A.O.U. arcade show played host to many of the major new titles planned for Japanese and American arcades in the coming year, giving arcade operators and the press their first opportunities to go one-on-one with all sorts of hot new games. Any company involved in making and distributing arcade games for the Japanese market was represented, including companies such as Capcom, Konami, Namco, Sega, SNK and Taito, and though it seemed small by comparison to other arcade shows I've attended, the excitement level was very high.

The game that made the biggest impact was certainly Virtua Fighter 3, despite the fact that you couldn't even play the game yet, and Street Fighter Zero (Alpha) 2 had people pushing buttons constantly. Here are the major booths one by one, starting with Sega.

There was a total of six playable games on display at Sega's booth, but the one game that everyone really wanted to play was restricted to a video tape demo: Virtua Fighter 3, with taped footage from Sega's brand-new Model 3 arcade board. *IG's FUSION* printed the specs and some general information on the game last month in a section accidentally labeled as JAMMA (sorry—we'll have to wait a little while for that arcade show), so here's some more on VF3. In one word, the demonstration was amazing; the characters moved with grace and speed that had to be seen to be believed, and the number of polygons that went into making tiny details such as facial features must be huge—they looked properly molded and shaped like real human faces, particularly the female characters, and put another way, you wouldn't be so quick to think that you're looking at polygons anymore. The only time I noticed polygons was when Jeffry started doing muscleman poses, and you could just make out some sharp edges of polygons on that screen. Having said that, there's no doubt that VF3 will set the standards for graphic presentation at arcades this summer.

▲ Tokyo Wars is Namco's answer to Sega's Desert Tank. The big difference, of course, is the fact that it is set in the streets of Tokyo.

Obviously, once you see something that impressive, you begin to think that perhaps you're only watching the opening demo and are not seeing the actual in-game artwork. Believe it or not, Sega claims that it's all being done in realtime... but why, you might ask, would they bring out a video tape if they could show the actual game? *IG's FUSION* has learned from sources inside Sega that the video tape shown there was heavily edited to splice multiple in-game sequences together and eliminate some unsightly problems from public view, namely the fact that AM2's design team has been pushing the new Model 3 architecture incredibly hard to make the game as visually impressive as possible and does not have much of the actual game logic running yet. Translation: Programmers have to use any game machine for multiple purposes, including graphics, audio and gameplay. AM2 has programmed an ambitious graphics engine which, at the moment, is using up most of the processing power in the Model 3, so though the video tape represented what the Model 3 can do near its current peak performance, the final VF3 game release may have to compromise perfect graphics so that there's an actual game to play there. It's also worth mentioning that AM2's Yu Suzuki has gone on the record saying that designers of Model 3 board games will ignore the fact that Sega will inevitably want to make

▲ Art of Fighting Gaiden brings Ryo and Robert into fights with characters such as Wang, a hobo with a pelican in his bag.

The VF3 tape shown to date has been heavily edited to eliminate unsightly problems; much of the game's logic is not actually running yet.

home Saturn translations, and will go all out with graphics and audio to keep Sega's arcade games on the cutting edge. In other words, expect a VF3 home translation (to be announced at E3) to use a modified home VF2/ Fighting Vipers graphics engine and nothing more.

Other games are hard to discuss after looking at VF3, but they do shine in what they are trying to achieve. Virtua Fighter Kids is definitely an example of this, as it's an SD (Super Deformed, big heads) version of Virtua Fighter 2, and the size of the characters' heads is roughly the size of the rest of their bodies. In this game, the creators seem to be trying to achieve a more cartoony atmosphere with a large dollop of humor—Shun Di carries and slurps from a baby bottle rather than a flask of wine. Another polygonal fighting game, and one I actually enjoyed more, was Sonic and Tails, the Sonic the Hedgehog fighting game. All of your favorite Sonic characters (and new ones) appear to punch the "rings" out of each other. Also on display were Decathlete, a game gearing up for the impending Summer Olympics; Gunblade N.Y., a shooting game where the view changes as the helicopter moves around New York City, and both their older Manx T.T. and Virtua On: Cyber Troopers games were there as well. Sega truly made their presence felt at the show.

Namco's booth was filled with people looking at the new and innovative things that Namco has been working on for the last few months. One odd game that drew crowds was Propcycle, a game in which you control a bicycle-propelled plane through the air and gather points by popping balloons. This is a whimsical and amusing title, but hardly spectacular except for the fact that you control the on-screen action by actually using a stationary bike. You change your speed by pedaling slower or faster and change your direction by tilting or rotating the handles—there are even fans built in to give you the feeling of rushing wind. Considering the combination of the big viewing screen and the bike, maybe Namco should ring Pee Wee Herman for an endorsement deal?...Food for thought.

Another Namco game that brings players into an unusual control scheme was Alpine Surfer, where snowboarders can show off in arcades (see last month's Japan Today) with a few new courses and the ability to do stunts—the stunts are graphical flourishes, more than things you can precisely control with your foot

AM2's Model 3 games will ignore the fact that Sega will inevitably want Saturn ports.

▼ (inset) The object of Midnight Run is to beat three other drivers on a closed track while also attempting to avoid ordinary traffic.

▲ Jet Wave (Wave Shark in America) is Konami's answer to the Namco "ride-on" games. Jet Wave, as you can see, is a jet ski racing game; American distributors are very interested.

▲ Ace Driver: Victory Lap is Namco's sequel to Ace Driver. The new version is also powered by the Super System 22 board, and features yet more Formula 1 racing.

◀ Powered by their Super System 22 board, Namco's Prop Cycle is certainly innovative, with the player keeping his or her craft aloft by pedaling harder...

▼ An overview of the AOU show floor, where everything from redemption toys to children's rides to the latest vids were shown.

▼ (inset) Super GT 24h is the latest racing game from Jaleco, a company that is still looking for its next arcade hit.

inputs. Also on display was Prime Goal EX, a soccer game; Dunk Mania, a basketball game; and Victory Lap, the second release of Ace Driver. My favorite game, described last issue, was Tokyo Wars, and I probably would have played it for hours if I had discovered it earlier in the day. Xevious 3 (a.k.a. Xevious 3D/G) is a PlayStation-compatible System 11 board with a combination of pre-rendered and realtime polygon artwork, shifting camera perspectives and classic Xevious-style gameplay. It's only shown in brochures, but it looks great.

Capcom's booth drew most of its crowd because of Street Fighter Zero 2, which has been on test in Japanese and U.S. arcades for a few weeks and will wind up in full release in Summer. (Capcom plans PS and Saturn versions for late this year or early '97!) With the addition of five new characters (Sakura [Japanese female emulating Ryu], Rolento [Final Fight big boss], Gen [SF1 old man with multiple fighting styles], Dhalsim [SF2 limb-stretcher] and Zangief [SF2 wrestler]) and all of the original characters, there are at least 18 total players and much improved backgrounds.

Another Capcom fighting game—this one 3-D polygon-based—was Star Gladiators, a futuristic robot-sword fighting game that doesn't quite compare to Namco's Soul Edge in overall design, but does look a lot like an enhanced Zero Divide. There are six main gladiators (Zelkin, Gore, Gamof, Bilstein, Vector and Rimgal) from various star systems—a small number at the moment—and as Capcom's first internal endeavor into polygon fighting, what was there was pretty impressive: The camera angle rotates, zooms and pulls back a lot to show off special moves, including one where a character grows to roughly three times its normal height and starts to beat the other gladiator senseless. Star Gladiators looked flashy and fast-moving while including solid gameplay—rumor has it that Capcom snagged one of Namco's developers to work on it.

▲ Sega had many Virtua Fighter Kids games on display, playing in their two-monitor cabinets.

▲ Alpine Surfer is the snowboarding follow-up to Namco's innovative skiing game Alpine Racer.

Capcom's Star Gladiators looks a lot like an enhanced Zero Divide; rumor has it that Capcom snagged one of Namco's developers to work on it.

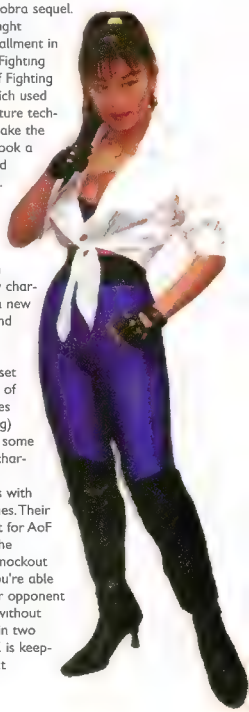
◀ GunBlade NY is a Sega shooting game much in the vein of Operation Wolf. As the side gunners aboard a helicopter gunship, you get to mow down tons of bad guys with a high caliber machine gun.

◀ Taito's Psychic Force is that company's entry into the crowded 3-D fighting game market. Psychic Force features eight playable characters, each the master of a particular power or element.

Taito also brought a polygon fighting game to the show, but this one used a different twist on the established format. Psychic Force takes place in a cubical fighting arena, Kekkai, where the characters fly around and do their special attacks, and it's designed such that it's possible to have up to four people fighting each other at the same time. Unfortunately, the show demonstration was restricted to two people at once, so no one was able to get a real grasp of how the four-player action would look. Psychic Force's graphics make it look like you're in a 3-D environment, but the game plays a lot more as if you're in a top-down 2-D game. Eight characters control various elemental powers, giving you a lot of variation in the possible "supernatural" attacks a player can perform, and when you add the game's dash power to the mix, you can dodge your opponents' attacks and counter from behind.

It's easy to confuse some of Taito's similar names—it turns out that the sequel to last year's Ray Force isn't Psychic Force after all; the sequel is called Raystorm. It's a vertical shooting game with a lock-on type special weapon. Taito also was playing up the nostalgia angle as well, with the next installment in the Bubble Bobble series titled Bubble Memories, and they even brought Nintendo's Killer Instinct 2 to the show. As of today, American-made fighters have failed to excite the Japanese arcade market, but KI2 is being given a chance in the fiercest of competitive times...good luck. Taito also had Landing Gear, a plane landing simulator with seven types of planes, and a new overhead Twin Cobra sequel.

SNK brought another installment in their Art of Fighting series, Art of Fighting Legends, which used motion- capture technology to make the characters look a bit more fluid and realistic. Robert Garcia and Ryo Sakazaki return again with six new characters and a new story line, and though AoF fans will no doubt be upset to see some of their favorites (such as King) finally gone, some of the new characters have relationships with the older ones. Their new concept for AoF Legends is the "Ultimate Knockout (KO)," so you're able to beat your opponent in a match without having to win two rounds. SNK is keeping the exact



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- Play one of 38 exciting rulers, eight of whom you can create yourself
- Set enemy units, ships or cities ablaze using a variety of FIRE commands
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Japan Today

◀ **Taito's RayStorm is the sequel to RayForce, which was released for the Saturn here as Galactic Attack. The sequel differs in one major way: As you can see here, the game is played on a horizontal monitor rather than a vertical one.**

technique a secret, but it seems to depend on the amount of life your opponent has left and the special finishing move you use.

SNK keeps showing people what can be done with their aging technology and a bit of innovation. SNK didn't have many other games (except Metal Slug, a side-scrolling walk- or drive-and-shoot title) on display, but their third-party licensees brought a few new titles for the Neo•MVS. Sunsoft brought a new fighting game, Waku Waku 7, and as the name suggests, there are seven characters that can be chosen from, ranging from a normal human boy to the down-right bizarre (fat) forest guardian (he looks like a Totoro; ask your local manga maniac about them). Another company with a couple of games on display was Saurus, which is trying to capitalize on the soccer craze here with a mini soccer game (Futsal) and the lack of Neo shooters with a title called Brikin'ger. Data East also has a puzzle game called Magical Drop 2, but did not bring their new Fighter's History game for display.

Konami's booth didn't have too much activity: They had a jet ski game where you could actually stand on a jet ski, but the game itself didn't have too much else to offer.

There were a few other fighting games and some relatively interesting driving games, but the show was definitely dominated by Namco and Sega. The coming year will definitely prove who was more successful in gaining the interest of the arcade operators—I know I'll be spending much too much time in arcades this summer...

▼ **Puzzle games are still popular in Japan, and Konami is still catering to that market with the latest in their Taisen Puzzle Dama series. These machines in particular showcase Konami's high-end Sauroid cabinet.**

REPORT

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pc-windows

RECENT RELEASES

Hind - *Interactive Magic*
The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Case of the Rose Tattoo - *Electronic Arts*
Blood & Magic - *Interplay*
Chaos Overlords - *New World*
Cry.sys - *Sierra*
Star Trek Generations - *Spectrum Holobyte*
Klingon - *SSI*
Syndicate Wars - *Electronic Arts*

MAY

Vegas Games 95 - *New World*
P.T.O. II - *Koei*
Into The Void *Playmates Interactive*

JUNE

Subterrane - *New World*
Earthworm Jim 2 - *Playmates Interactive*

JULY

Dragon Dice - *Interplay*

SEPTEMBER

Power Slave - *Playmates Interactive*

RECENT RELEASES

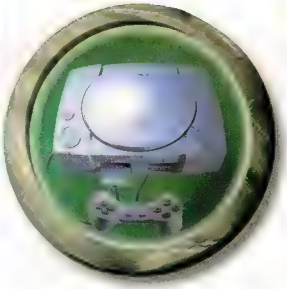
Deadly Skies - *JVC*
Jeopardy - *GameTek*
Wheel of Fortune - *GameTek*
Snow Job - *3DO*
Golden Gate - *3DO*

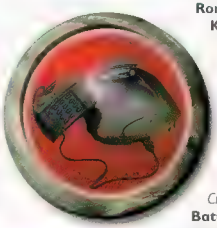
MAY

Clay Fighter II - *Interplay*

JUNE

NHL 96 - *Electronic Arts*
Skeleton Warrior - *Playmates Interactive*





3do

RECENT RELEASES

Iron Soldier 2 (CD) - *Atari*
Brett Hull Hockey (CD) - *Atari*

MAY

Soulstar (CD) - *Atari*

JUNE

Breakout 2000 - *Atari*
Demolition Man (CD) - *Atari*
Varuna's Forces - *Atari*

JULY

Zero Five - *Atari*

AUG

Skyhammer - *Atari*

SEPTEMBER

Phaze Zero - *Atari*
MK3 - *Williams*

OCTOBER

Rocky Horror Interactive (CD) - *Atari*
BattleSphere - *4Play*

NOVEMBER

Magic Carpet (CD) - *Atari*

playstation

RECENT RELEASES

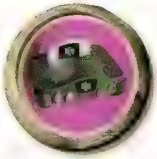
Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV - *Koei*
Family Feud - *GameTek*
Legacy of Kain - *Capstone*
VR Golf - *Interplay*
VR Soccer - *Interplay*

MAY

3D Baseball - *Crystal Dynamics*
Battle Arena Tohshinden 2 - *Playmates Interactive*

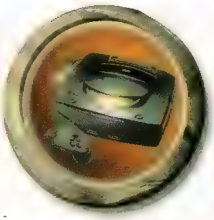
JUNE

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Magic Carpet - *Interplay*
Rock and Roll Racing 2 - *Accolade*
Waterworld - *Interplay*
Skeleton Warrior - *Playmates Interactive*



COMING SOON

Killer Instinct 64 *Nintendo/Rare*
Cruis'n USA *Nintendo/Williams Entertainment*
Body Harvest - *Nintendo/DMA Design*
Turok: Dinosaur Hunter - *Acclaim*
Ultra Doom - *Williams Entertainment*
PilotWings 64 - *Nintendo/Paradigm Simulation, Inc.*
Top Gun: A New Adventure - *Spectrum Holobyte*
(Ultimate) Mortal Kombat 3 - *Williams Entertainment*
Red Baron - *Sierra*
Creator - *Nintendo/Software Creations*
Buggie-Boogie - *Nintendo/Angel Studios*
Robotech Academy - *Gametek*
Monster Dunk - *Mindscape*
Ken Griffey Jr. Baseball - *Nintendo/Angel Studios*
Shadows of the Empire - *LucasArts Entertainment*
FIFA Soccer '97 - *EA Sports*
Super Mario 64 - *Nintendo*
Super Mario Kart R - *Nintendo*
StarFox 64 - *Nintendo*
Kirby Bowl 64 - *Nintendo*
Wave Race 64 - *Nintendo*
Blastdozer - *Nintendo/Rare*
GoldenEye 007 - *Nintendo/Rare*
The Legend of Zelda - *Nintendo for the 64DD*
Wayne Gretzky Hockey - *Time Warner Interactive*
Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Ace Driver - *Namco*
Mission: Impossible - *Ocean*
SoulStorm *Virtual Hollywood*
Alien Trilogy - *Acclaim*
Quake - *GT Interactive/id Software*
Stacker - *Virgin Interactive*
Phear - *Nintendo/H2O Entertainment*
Prey - *Apogee/3D Realms*
Dragon Quest VII - *Enix for the 64DD*
Donkey Kong Country 3 - *Nintendo/Rare*



RECENT RELEASES

Winning Post - *Koei*
Deadly Skies - *JVC*
Jeopardy - *GameTek*
NBA Action - *Sega*
Wheel of Fortune - *GameTek*
Wing Commander III - *Electronic Arts*

MAY

3D Soccer - *Crystal Dynamics*
Alone in the Dark *Interplay*
Descent II - *Interplay*
Raw Pursuit - *Acclaim*
Project Overkill - *Konami*
Maximum Surge - *Digital Pictures*

JUNE

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball - *Acclaim*
Extreme Pinball - *Electronic Arts*
Hell - *GameTech*
Magic Carpet - *Electronic Arts*
Prize Fighter - *Digital Pictures*
VR Pool - *Interplay*
X-Men: Children of the Atom
NBA In The Zone - *Konami*
Castlevania Bloodlines - *Konami*
Varuna's Forces - *JVC*
Earthworm Jim 2 - *Playmates Interactive*

SEPTEMBER

Power Slave - *Playmates Interactive*

new releases

This list is compiled from various sources including company releases and retail store guides. As such, all titles and dates are subject to change.

Olympic Games

Summer Games, Soccer, Dream Team Basketball

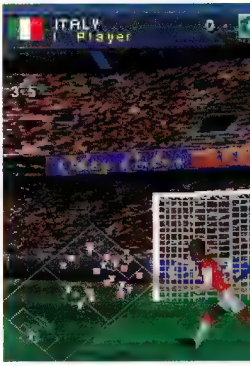
Just in time for Atlanta's games, virtual Soccer, Hoops and Track come home

Publisher: U.S. Gold
Platform: PlayStation
Platform: Saturn / PC
Format: CD-ROM
Developer: Silicon Dreams
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

There arguably hasn't been an entertaining Olympic video game since the glory days of button-slamming gameplay made popular by Konami's Track and Field and EPYX's old line of Summer Games titles. Whether the drought is a consequence of the summer Olympics' infrequency (the real things only happen once every four years) or a result of a perceived lack of consumer interest, one thing is certain: Several companies have taken up the task of creating Olympic multi-event competition games for 1996, including Konami (Track and Field '96 [AKA Hyper Olympics in Atlanta]), Studio 3DO (Decathalon) and U.S. Gold. The latter's developer, Silicon Dreams, is doing its best to make Olympic Summer Games deliver a variation on a proven gaming formula with an entirely fresh, 32-Bit look.

Silicon Dreams isn't stopping their Olympic quest with track and field events, however. U.S. Gold is ambitiously attempting to corner a large part of the hot Olympic software market by having their U.K.-based development team tackle the even more complex subject of Olympic Soccer, and placed the onus of Dream Team Basketball development upon the San Jose-based firm Anvil. Silicon Dreams' 3DO versions of Olympic Soccer and Summer Games are set to be published in the months to come by Panasonic for the 3DO, and rumors place the team as a developer of olympic-themed software for Matsushita's M2 hardware, as well.

▲ A prerendered mock-up of Dream Team's in-game perspective and graphics; note the reflections on the court's surface and detail in the characters' bodies. An M2 version–rumored to be coming–could look like this.



Each of the 16 events uses motion capture to realistically represent each athlete in his or her respective sport.

If there is a resonating theme among the three games other than the fact that they are all components of the Olympics, it is certainly the extensive use of motion capture and 3-D development techniques to animate polygon-based, texture-mapped athletes. Each of the 16 events in Olympic Summer Games uses extensive motion capture to realistically represent each athlete in his or her respective sport. While

▼ A high-resolution prerendered mock-up of the stadium, characters and perspective used in Olympic Summer Games.

OSG is in actuality more of an action game than a simulation, the fluidity and accurate recreation of athletic motions adds polish to the

Olympic Soccer has a leg up on FIFA–instead of using sprites, its characters are comprised of polygons.

fast-paced package. Silicon Dreams additionally opted to use motion capture to spice the game up with little "personality" gestures—some of the best include several runners fidgeting while crouched at the starting line before the race, the winner of an event jumping up and waving his arms in celebration, and a competitor bowing his head in shame as a result of a poor performance. As impressive as it looks in OSG,

▼ The stadium, characters and field in Olympic Soccer are all realtime texture-mapped polygon objects.

the motion capture in Olympic Soccer is far more essential—each player's movements (including headers, fakes and bicycle kicks) have all been given heightened fluidity using this development technique.

The fully three-dimensional environments of both Olympic games are simply superb. Olympic Soccer will undoubtedly be forever compared with Electronic Arts' FIFA Soccer because of the similarities in their presentation—both use multiple roving camera views and realtime rendered stadiums. Olympic Soccer has a leg up on FIFA, however, in that the former is a truly 3-D experience with players comprised of highly detailed texture-mapped polygons instead of the two-dimensional sprites in FIFA Soccer. As a result, the characters in Olympic Soccer can move with greater fluidity and more realistically within the game's camera perspectives than their sprite-based counterparts

Olympic Summer Games has very impressive 3-D environments, especially for a game based on track and field events. All of the essentials for each event are comprised of texture-mapped polygons, including the track, its markings and the swimming pool. Even more impressive is that the entire Olympic arena and its surroundings enjoy the same treatment. For instance, on the PlayStation version previewed by *Intelligent Gamer*, there are rotating video screens somewhat reminiscent of those in Battle Arena Toshinden, simultaneously displaying the action happening in a small screen in the background. There are also 3-D scoreboards showing times and jump distances, alongside pieces of other sporting equipment strewn about the Olympic Coliseum used in other events

▲ Rendered video sequences for Olympic Soccer are markedly different from their in-game equivalents; note the rounded edges on the character.

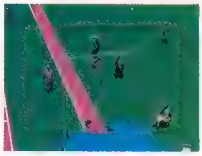
Like Olympic Soccer, Olympic Summer Games also has its share of camera views. In the Javelin event, for example, the player can choose to watch the action from the target area of the throw, effectively making the javelin appear to fly right at you. In the swimming event, there are optional underwater views. Each event has several optional camera angles from different vantage points, with at least a couple interesting ones available in each competition

The controllable athletes in each game blend in perfectly with their surroundings. Made up of more than 100 polygons, each polygonal character is readily distinguishable, especially in Summer Games where each player has facial features such as beards and mustaches. Different patterns of jerseys are colored in their country's official colors, and are complete with numbers—even competitors wear them, which is a nice touch. Olympic Soccer's players aren't quite as detailed, due to the fact that there are many more of them running around on screen at once, but they are still quite impressive.. certainly more than conventional, sprite-based characters.

▶ Prerendered images convey the artistic style U.S. Gold is aiming for with the multiple events in their Summer Games release. Actual in-game art will be pared down substantially.

The 16 Olympic Summer Games Events

100M Relay
400M Relay
Archery
Discus
Fencing
Javelin
Hammer
High Jump
Long Jump
Pole Vault
Rapid-Fire Pistol
Skeet Shooting
Swimming
100M
Triple Jump
Weightlifting



Special moves can be used to shoot a goal; the whole concept is strangely not unlike a fighting game in some respects.

Gameplay is a large issue in every title, but rarely is there as much difficulty in balancing and tweaking it as there is with sports games.

Olympic Soccer uses a learning curve where mastering one type of move in the game will result in that technique becoming the building block for something more

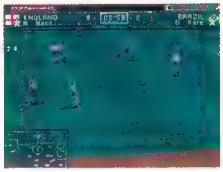
▲ Another in-game image; thanks to the camera view and texture-mapped characters, your player can be quite large and you can still see the field in front of you.

difficult. Olympic Soccer even goes so far to implement special-move combos, in which many moves and special moves can be used to shoot a goal or to perform an action. The whole concept is strangely not unlike a fighting game in some respects, and although this may seem somewhat off the wall and akin to something that might be called "Street Fighter Soccer," Silicon Dreams promises not to let down students and fans of the game by throwing realism out of the window. Numerous soccer moves such as banana kicks, diving headers and give-and-gos are all contained within the game, but it will take an experienced gamer to understand when and how to use them.

It should be also noted that this is probably the Ferrari of soccer games—considering the number of polygons on screen at once, Olympic Soccer is very fast. The ball can get from one side of the field to another in no time at all.

Olympic Summer Games is a little different. There is no denying that gameplay is certainly not complicated—just press the buttons as quickly and efficiently as possible, and you stand a good chance of winning. People who take the pacifist approach to button pressing can use the "revolutionary rhythm technique," (see interview sidebar) but the game's strategy is then only slightly changed and you'll burn less calories. Nevertheless, this game is actually very fun, and there is a large and presently unsatisfied constituency of gamers who like this sort of multi-event game.

It should also be noted that Silicon Dreams has provided a lot of options in both of their sports games. Olympic Soccer offers 32 international teams, six different stadiums, five weather conditions and a variety of rules and regulation toggles. Both games offer three variations of play comprised of Olympic, Arcade and Challenge modes, most of them self-explanatory. Summer Olympic games allows a whopping eight people to compete for the gold, though only some of the events actually allow all of them on-screen at once. Events such as weightlifting aren't exactly conducive to eight players filling the screen at the same time, nor



▲ By the same token, you can also zoom out into an FIFA-like tiny character perspective and the characters will remain detailed and accurate.

is skeet-shooting, which could otherwise turn into something out of *Reservoir Dogs*. Olympic Soccer allows a respectable four players to play at once.

While it remains to be seen whether Konami, Studio 3DO or U.S. Gold comes out on top of the Olympic pile, the latter's efforts with Silicon Dreams could quite possibly give them a strong foothold in the Olympic market. The quality and potential of these two sports games should help to provide U.S. Gold with one of its stronger software lineups in many years.

Adam Polanski
Programmer

Andy McLernan
Programmer

Claire Warne
Graphic Artist

U.S. GOL

IG was given the opportunity to conduct an interview with Silicon Dreams' Rob Palfreman, the Producer of both Summer Olympic Games and Olympic Soccer for all three of the platforms.

IG: Olympic Summer Games is coming out for the PC CD-ROM, PlayStation and Saturn. What will be the main differences in the three versions of these games?

Rob: The PlayStation version will be the quickest, the PC CD-ROM version will have an extra high-resolution mode in it which will look really, really nice. The Saturn... um, basically

they are all very similar, they all have their little pluses and minuses, but gameplay wise, which is what we really concentrate on, we're going to keep them all the same.

IG: What exactly is the "revolutionary rhythm control" that is being touted as an alternative way of playing the game in the Olympic Summer Games press materials?

Rob: We've been using focus groups [for our target audience] and basically about 80 percent of them love button-bashing. I personally love button-bashing, but some of them found they didn't want to put themselves through that much strenuous activity. So we've come up with this method that a bar will move backwards and forward or up and down according to the event, and you must use your skill to stop it before it hits the end of another bar. If it hits the end, you will decelerate, and vice-versa.

IG: After playing the game, I would summarize Olympic Summer Games as a "3-D Track and Field."

Rob: Basically, yeah! Our philosophy is that gameplay is everything; graphics are very important, but at the end of the day, it all comes down to gameplay. Track and Field worked, so we've gone one step further now. We've got the playfield equal to or higher than it. We've got the flashy graphics, the motion-capture for the athletes, and so forth.

IG: The motion-capture is really one of the highlights of this title.

Rob: Yes, we are trying to get more of it in, such as celebrations after the race, things like that. We use it on all of the athletes. I say

Dave Cullinane
Graphic Artist

Giles Park
Programmer

John Hancock
Music Programmer

Max Little
Sound Effects

(left) Rob Palfreman
Producer
(right) Mark Walden
Producer

Rodney Mack
Programmer

D'S DREAM TEAM

athletes, but in events like skeet-shooting, they are just guys with guns (laughs).

IG: Has anything been changed in the game's graphics since the version of Olympic Games that we've received?

Rob: Yes, we've texture-mapped the athlete's uniforms in their country colors, and they all have their numbers now. They'll have much more detailed heads on. We've found a way of putting very high-resolution heads on them so that gives us the ability to have different color hair, skin, mustaches, beards. You will be able to easily recognize the characters each time you play.

IG: For the most part, the events are each quite different. Which were the most technically demanding?

Rob: Swimming was very difficult because the water effect is quite tricky; especially when trying to get eight athletes consisting of over 100 polygons each moving at a fast speed in each direction. The water will be transparent, complete with underwater camera views, with ripples and distortions in the water. The most difficult part of any of the events was balancing the gameplay and tweaking it.

IG: Let's talk about your new Olympic soccer game. This one will also hit three platforms, the PlayStation, PC CD-ROM and Sega Saturn. Any notable differences?

Rob: Not that any of the versions are slow, but the PlayStation version is a bit faster.

IG: Has FIFA Soccer, which many people would call the pioneer of 32-Bit soccer, had any influence on Olympic Soccer? The 3-D perspectives in the games are strikingly similar.

Rob: No, not really. What we found is with FIFA Soccer is that it does look very nice, but when it comes to playability, it's not up to par. Basically what we feel about FIFA is that it is still basically the same game that came out on the Mega Drive [European/Japanese version of the Genesis] over four years ago.

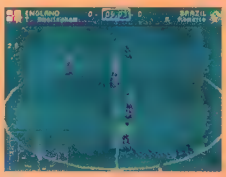
IG: What are some of the fundamental differences between FIFA and Olympic Soccer?

Rob: What we tried to do with Olympic Soccer was we put a much bigger range of movement in it. You can string moves together, you can chip the ball halfway down the field. By another sequence of buttons, another player can chest it down, and then volley it or over-head kick it. Rather than just running down the middle of the field then shooting at the goal, we've put in crossing features, diving headers, upward headers; a whole range of movement.

IG: Olympic Soccer is obviously entirely 3-D; what type of advantages does this give you over previous sprite-based soccer games?

Rob: The playability and fluidity of Olympic Soccer is enhanced by the full 3-D engine. Sprites really hurt the gameplay in games like FIFA.

IG: Avid soccer fans in the U.S. have been asking for a complete soccer game in terms of realism and graphics. How does your game address this?



Rob: We've tried to design the game so that a newcomer can come right in and play at least the basics: Shooting and passing the ball. The more you play it, the more you learn the intricacies such as chesting the ball down and volleying it is a really good way of doing a shot. But that has to be preceded by a long-cross. It's easily accessible, but difficult to master.

IG: So there is a gradual learning curve?

Rob: Yes. It's like a fighting game, the more you play, the more moves you can pull off. There are multiple fakes and combinations of moves.

IG: Perfect 11 by Konami has generally been regarded as the best mix of graphics and realism, how does Olympic Soccer compare?

Rob: Yes, Perfect 11 is a very good game. We thought the main drawback to that game is that it was a bit slow. We've addressed that problem with our game—it runs very fast.

IG: Does Olympic Soccer comply with FIFA and Olympic rules and regulations? Many of the previous soccer games have had trouble in this fashion?

Rob: Yes, it has the back-pass rule, the offsides rule, everything. We have options to turn these off since many gamers don't like these rules, especially the offsides.

IG: How complete are the games at this point?

Rob: Both games are around 90 percent complete. Summer Olympics Games is essentially a large number of coders doing separate events. All that is left to do is to compile it into a single game. The computer AI in Olympic Soccer is currently being worked on

IG: Should they make their planned June release?

Rob: Yes, it appears so.

IG: Several reports and lists place these two games as part of the M2's launch lineup. Can you confirm this?

Rob: The M2 is something we are considering at this point.

▶ Though you shouldn't expect the in-game graphics to look this clean, the same movements and essential character structures are being retained.

Publisher: U.S. Gold
Platform: PlayStation
Platform: Saturn
Developer: Anvil
Format: CD-ROM
Release: June 1996

▲ The developers at Anvil have worked with detailed wireframe models to build characters for Dream Team Basketball.

Now if watching the Dream Team crush international competition on television every four years hasn't satisfied your Olympic Basketball craving, then U.S. Gold's Dream Team Basketball may just be the game for you. In their third Olympic-licensed product, U.S. Gold places you in control of the Dream Team for the (laughable?) challenge of capturing the Olympic Gold medal

U.S. Gold is promising a true 3-D environment for Dream Team Basketball, much like Sony's "NBA Shoot Out" which is also previewed in this issue. There will be several fully rendered Olympic venues modeled after the real structures in Atlanta and, in addition, the players will consist entirely of polygons, while motion-capture technology will help to make their movements realistic. The game's television-style presentation will attempt to take advantage of this polygonal world by incorporating multiple camera views, and player-controlled instant replays.

It appears that the greatest emphasis in DTB is being put into the development of realistic reproductions of the Dream Team players. The incomplete 3-D graphics that were shown to *IG* showed a lot of promise, particularly with some impressive, highly-detailed texture-mapping on the Dream Team members themselves. Thankfully, the game's developer, San Jose-based Anvil, is not relying on graphics alone to create the overall persona of the players. Hakeem Olajuwon, Anfernee Hardaway, Shaquille O'Neal, John Stockton and company will be armed with their real-life "signature moves" and hot plays such as the "gorilla dunk," finger-rolls and no-look passes—you can probably guess that John Stockton's signature move won't be the gorilla dunk. Thus instead of playing with a character who just looks like your favorite NBA star (as was the case in NBA Jam), gamers will be in control of one that looks and plays like the individual in question, and fortunately, computer-generated Dream Teamers won't complain about standing at attention during the playing of the national anthem.

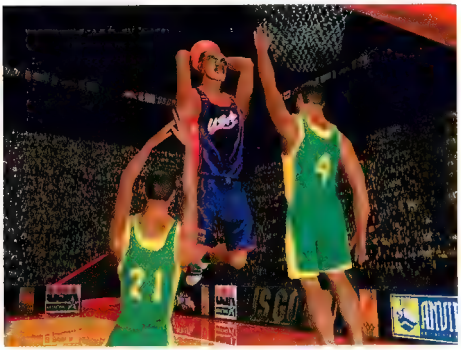
Just how difficult can you make a game where the title recalls scenes from an all-star basketball team that normally destroys its competition by a minimum of 30 points? Fortunately, Dream Team Basketball shouldn't just be a cake-walk simulation—it does incorporate some varying degrees of difficulty, and U.S. Gold promises that some of the international teams will give Dream Team III a challenge. To raise the difficulty bar even higher, gamers can choose to control one of the sacrificial 31 international teams such as Croatia, Canada or the basketball juggernaut known as South Korea to experience the frustration of competing against the Dream Team in exhibition or Olympic tournament play. If you thought Ghouls 'n Ghosts was a challenge way back when, imagine trying to use some guy named Deng Woo to put the smack down on Shaq.

Just how difficult can you make a game where the real-life team normally destroys its competition by a minimum of 30 points?

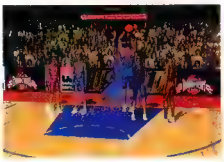
Dream Team Basketball does have some notable features, such as its four-player simultaneous option on the PlayStation and Saturn. Each person can "role-play" through a game, controlling an individual player on the basketball team throughout the entire contest; a feature particularly useful during the multiplayer mode where four people could each control an individual player on one team, or have a few people on different teams. Each role-played character could also compare his individual statistics in the game or throughout the tournament, which no doubt could be run up by competing against inferior competition.

U.S. Gold has a healthy amount of potential in Dream Team Basketball—if nothing else, it's a fresh and untraditional take on the popular five-on-five sport. It's currently planned to hit store shelves for the PlayStation and Saturn in June, 1996.

— *Kraig Kujawa*



▲ Two-man coverage on the net and he still carries it to the hoop—just like the real Dream Team in action.



▲ Featuring a true 3-Dimensional environment with polygonal players the game challenges the best of the best in overall graphic realism.

http://www.USGOLD.com

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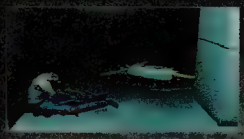

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Buster Brothers Collection

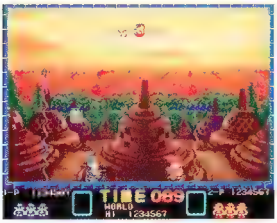
After a flood of fighters, Capcom revisits three of their lesser known titles

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation/Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: Spring '96

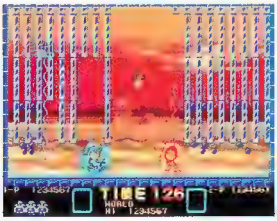
Before Capcom had Street Fighter II, it had Buster Brothers (known in Japan as Pang or Pomping World), and if you're new to the series, you'll get into it quickly. The premise is simple: The world is being invaded by an evil more powerful than anything ever seen in the universe—killer bubbles. As true superheroes, the Buster Brothers are sent out to rid the earth of this horrible threat armed with spear-tipped rope guns. The game places the armed Brothers at the bottom of screens as bubbles fall from the top. Sounds corny, doesn't it? Well, the theme is cutesy but the gameplay is quickly addictive.

Capcom's Buster Brothers games have been released for several systems in the past few years, and the original arcade game spawned two sequels. Thankfully, the PlayStation- and Saturn-bound Buster Brothers Collection CD includes all three of the BB arcade games in one package.

▲ Here's the product of a particularly bad set of shots by a player: A huge number of bubbles come crashing down toward you and you've already launched your rope... it's time to run left, or else you can kiss your goofy backward baseball cap goodbye.



▲ Lush, colorful scenery is frequently based upon actual cities, monuments and scenes from around the world.



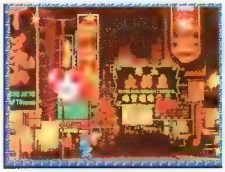
▲ Armed with bubble shields, the heroes face a tricky challenge here: Hit the tiny bubbles as they fall from tightly packed platforms.

The games are fairly similar to each other; Super Buster Brothers (aka Super Pang), for example, has two different modes of play: Panic and Tour Mode. In Panic Mode, bubbles continuously fall down at you, and it's your job to shoot and destroy them. It's not as easy as it might seem though, because once you shoot a bubble, it divides into two smaller bubbles, and so on until they are completely annihilated.

Tour Mode allows you and a buddy to go around the world into different locales and destroy the bubbles that are ravaging those areas. As you move through the stages, new and different obstacles (blocks and platforms) will appear in the way to hinder your progress through the game.

Along the way, you can collect power-ups that will aid you in your quest to rid the world of the bubble invaders. For example, one that's really important to success in many of the levels is the Double Shot, which allows you to have more than one shot on the screen at a time. Another allows you to connect your rope gun to a ceiling or platform for a few seconds to do away with any of the bubbles that happen to hit it, also tying up your shot in the process.

Control is easy to get used to, and after a while, it's much easier to hit the smallest bubbles with great precision. The first few levels get you acquainted with shooting both large and small targets, and the power-ups you'll need to get by each obstacle. Mastering all of the split-second timing needed in the later levels takes a little getting used to, but your Buster bashing skills will be refined by the time you reach them. The game's graphics are excellent, with a cartoony feel and scenic backdrops that add to the game's atmosphere.



▲ Between the three BB titles, only the third has rendered artwork; Buster Brothers and Super Buster Brothers would both be clearly old-fashioned 16-Bit titles if not for the two-player simultaneous option which fills the screens.

Sounds corny, doesn't it? Well, the theme is cutesy but the gameplay is quickly addictive.

Capcom's decision to put all three Buster games on one disc is much appreciated on this end: Buster Brothers Collection combines puzzles and shooting into several games that will please anyone who enjoys either genre.

- Chris Johnston

http://www.capcoment.com/buster.htm

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▶ From the mind of creator Mike Stemmle, scenes from Afterlife take on a look of Hades meets SimCity. While admitting some of his influence came from the Sim series, Mike put a unique twist on his version of a builder.

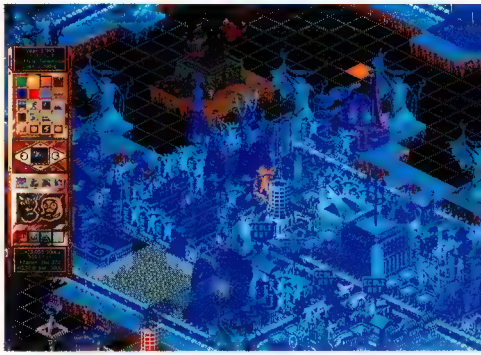
Afterlife

Once again LucasArts forges new ground in PC gaming with their new "beyond the grave" strategy builder

Publisher: LucasArts
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: LucasArts
Release: Late April/Early May

LucasArts has established an extremely strong reputation in the industry based largely on games in one of two genres: adventure games and titles based on the Star Wars trilogy. With Afterlife–their newest game, which has been in development for a year and three months and is now nearly ready to enter beta–LucasArts has diverged sharply from their previous products to come up with a highly original concept; a simulation game in the same vein as SimCity, yet with a very distinctive setting: the afterlife.

In Afterlife, you play a random guy who has been hired by the Powers that Be to build and maintain two small pieces of Heaven and Hell. You are responsible for making sure Souls are properly rewarded or punished, and you are paid for every Soul you process. However, should you fail to provide Souls with what they are expecting (which can be anything from rewards for Humility to punishments for Sloth to Reincarnation), they wander away, becoming Lost Souls, and costing you considerably. You also have to worry about paying the Angels and Demons that work for you. Of course, there are a large number of variables to deal with, from special structures awarded upon passing population milestones to disasters that occur, bringing your carefully constructed Afterlife to its figurative knees.



▲ Things don't look too friendly down there, could that be Hell–maybe! Regardless of its less-than-desirable reputation, things need to be attended to even in the ultimate domicile of pain and eternal anguish. Make sure the harshest punishment is distributed to the souls who really deserve it the most.

▲ Jumping from world to world, managing the lost souls and keeping workers happy are some of the larger tasks to stay on top of in the game.

You are responsible for making sure Souls are properly rewarded or punished, and you are paid for every Soul you process.

On screen, Afterlife is dominated by an isometric view of your slices of the planes of Heaven and Hell, with a small planet rotating innocently between them. Both of these planes have rivers and rocks distributed across them, along with Karma Portal Anchors; and floating between Heaven and Hell are the Karma Portals themselves. There is a large control panel on the left, with basic game statistics and a variety of buttons for performing the various game actions as well as modifying the way you view the afterlife in one way or another. Additionally, there are a number of ways of getting more detailed information, most of which result in a window popping up over the play area with the relevant data, be it the current population status of a building or the life (and afterlife)

history of a random Soul.

The basic mechanics of the game are quite simple: First, Heaven and Hell each need a Gate through which Souls may enter the appropriate setting to receive their eternal rewards (or punishments, as the case may be). As with most aspects of the game, there are different classes of Gates which may be bought, and the more expensive ones are able to allow more souls through in a given time period. Once the Gates are in place, Roads are necessary to allow Souls to travel to the buildings (known as Fate Structures) in which final rewards and punishments are ultimately meted out. Ports can also be built to allow souls to travel across the various rivers in the Afterlife in search of the appropriate Fate Structures.

Once Souls enter the Afterlife and travel around in it, they need somewhere to go. Here is where the Fate Structures come in. To create them, you simply zone out an area of land for a particular type of Fate Structure, and as the Souls arrive buildings will start to pop up. The Fate Structures are color-coded, with each color assigned to a virtue (for heavenly structures) and its opposing vice (for the buildings down below). Green stands for Contentment/Envy, Yellow for Charity/Avarice, Orange for Temperance/Gluttony, Brown for Diligence/Sloth, Purple for Chastity/Lust, Red for Peacefulness/Wrath, Blue for Humility/Pride, and Rainbow for Generic Virtue/Sin. As more and more Souls arrive, Fate Structures of a given type can merge into larger buildings with greater capacities, provided you have zoned out enough room for them to do so.

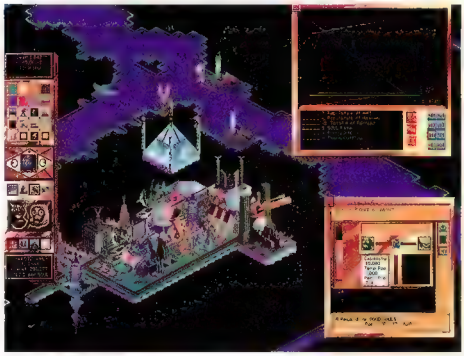
Once souls enter the Afterlife and travel around in it, they need somewhere to go. Here is where the Fate Structures come in.

Finally, a number of Souls believe in Reincarnation, so to accommodate them you have to create Karma Stations next to one of your Roads, and then run a Karma Track from the Station to one of the above-mentioned Portals, which will then allow the souls to return to life in a suitable alternate form.

Problems arise if Souls become lost, which can occur for several reasons: The particular Structure the souls are looking for may not be there, may be filled to capacity, or, for one reason or another, the Soul may not be able to get to it. If this occurs, a Lost Soul Spike appears, usually on a road. These are color-coded to indicate what sort of Structure they are looking for, to help you figure out the problem and accommodate their needs as quickly as possible.

Money is brought in solely from successfully processing Souls, although there are Penny Banks which allow you to take out loans at varying interest rates in order to finance your various projects. Costs arise from a variety of sources: Other than charges for Lost Souls, there is a small road upkeep, and a much more significant cost for paying Angels and Demons. This latter cost may be kept down by building Topias: structures for your employees to stay in, lowering commuting costs. Also, you may build Training Centers, which can train random Souls to be Angels or Demons and work for much cheaper wages. There is a feature to bring up a graph of where exactly your money is going, and you also have two helpers at your disposal: Aria and Jasper are an Angel and a Demon who tell you what your current top five problems are and suggest ways to fix them.

There is a variety of disasters that can occur, and they become more frequent as the game progresses. These affect either Heaven or Hell, and are always pretty detrimental to your attempts to keep processing all the waiting Souls. Some of them will, for instance, freeze up parts of the road and make them impassable, so you are forced to redirect the road to allow Souls to reach their destination. After much internal debate, the decision was made to include a "no Bad Things" option, which disables disasters but



▲ Early stages of the building process offer a number of options to the player, including the creation of color-coded Fate Structures for souls to reside.

◀ Is that Elvis? If it is, he doesn't look so good! The game's subtle and not-so-subtle humor are a tribute to Mike Stemmle's view of the world.

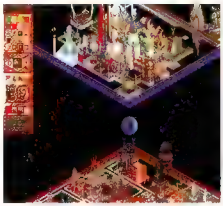
punishes you by drastically lowering the rate of incoming Souls. This can be turned on and off during the game, providing an interesting strategic twist.

Random nice features include: special Structures, awarded upon processing a certain number of Souls, which can affect the area around them and even ward off disasters to a certain extent; the Omnibolge and Love Dome, awarded at 1 billion Souls, are massive 7x7 structures with all sorts of fun properties; the Planet View allows you to spend money to make small influences in the Planet's population, perhaps changing their behavior or beliefs; the Soul View picks out a random Soul from the Afterlife for your viewing pleasure, along with information on its background and current status; and Ad Infinitum Siphons, which allow you to take resources from the rocks to improve the efficiency of your structures.

Aside from the originality of concept, one of the most immediately apparent aspects of Afterlife is the remarkable number of interesting references and amusing details that have been put in. For instance, the classes of Gates are: Dante Class, Pearl Class and Prophecy Class for Heaven, and Milton Class, Belial Class and Apocalypse Class for Hell.

"Afterlife is going to be the strangest game you're going to play this year."

– Mike Stemmle, project leader for Afterlife.



▲ **A very early view of the game taken in October of '95. Much of the detail has been brought in calculated increments.**

The Training Centers are: Community Colleges of the Clouds, Seraphim State Colleges and Halo Institute of Technology for Heaven, and The Burning Annex, Hellward Bound Retreats and Cloven Boot Camps for Hell. Also, the various Fate Structures which appear often have a humorous twist. A few of these are: Humble Pie, The Only Non-Sleazy Singles Bar in Creation, Taco Hell, Mortal Street Combat Fighter, Lust Freezers and Camp Mennihackatorso.

The music feels appropriate, with distinctly peculiar tunes based on music of various cultures worldwide, from generic chanting to Eastern sitar to a piece with a Yiddish theme.

All in all, Afterlife looks to provide simulation fans with a new concept that maintains depth of play while introducing a totally new and distinctive setting with a fresh humorous perspective. If all goes according to schedule, PC owners will be able to start doling out Divine Justice around the end of April.

- Brian Osserman

http://lucasarts.com

Mike Stemmle

Interview with LucasArts' Mike Stemmle, project leader of Afterlife, with comments from Tom Sarris, LucasArts' public relations. Previous projects for Mike include coding for Indiana Jones: Fate of Atlantis and acting as co-project leader for Sam and Max Hit the Road. As Project Leader, Mike is in charge of design and puts in a lot of programming time as well.

IG: Where did you get the idea for Afterlife?

Mike: I wanted to do a sim game; I have no particular desire to hinge it on anything in reality unless it was really strange. And plus, I've always been kind of fascinated by the concept of the afterlife. This whole thing as human beings that we do; we're so afraid of dying that we make up these huge elaborate mythologies to explain what happens to us after we die, when there's a decent possibility anyway that nothing happens.

IG: You've already talked about some of your goals in putting it together: just making it a really good sim game...

Mike: It's really kind of a 50-50 split for me. I wanted to do something funny, because I like doing quasi-funny strange things, and I wanted to make a really good sim, when you get past the basics of it which are pretty simple, there's all kinds of little trivial mathematical things you can putz around with for hours on end. You can keep playing the basics of Afterlife without knowing anything else for hours, and you'll see a lot of stuff, and a lot of stuff will pop up. Then, when you start reading the manual, you'll suddenly get probably 30-40 percent more buildings. In the demo, for example, we don't let you siphon the Ad Infinitum out of the rocks. And with that Ad Infinitum you can actually get more buildings out of it. You can't see about 50 percent of the rewards and punishments in the demo. The Omnibolges and Love Domes, I will freely admit are an out-and-out rip-off of the Arcologies in SimCity 2000, because they're such a good idea that I had to have them. We're thinking about doing something secret and cool with them later on. To sum up, I wanted to do something that was weird and strange and funny and simultaneously a really deep sim game, and I hope by the end of this we will have succeeded.

IG: What's your favorite single idea in or aspect of Afterlife?

Mike: I think I'm getting happier and happier with the Disco Inferno every day. The Disco Inferno is cool; it's a very nice disaster, it's got great music, and a little spinning disco ball, what else could you want? It's probably my favorite right now only because we actually have the elements together, we actually have the disco guy, we actually have the ball, and we actually have the music. Give me a couple of days and I'm sure one of the other disasters will probably pique my interest. I'll be very happy next weekend when I finish writing the last 10 tile descriptions which I still haven't gotten around to. I tried very hard to keep whatever creativity I had fresh by writing the tile descriptions as I went along...now that we're at the end, there's a few that I just haven't done, and I have to find the time to do them.

On how different this has been from previous games:

Mike: It's been an interesting learning experience; since it is our first simulation game, the testers and the programmers have been feeling their way through to try to figure out how to approach fixing bugs and things like that. They've been very useful, actually, giving me suggestions that are gonna be in the final game. Much more so than in, I think, an adventure game, where by the time the testers get a hold of it, the script's pretty much done, the themes are written.

Tom: The thing that supports what Mike is saying, [is that] this game is so different from anything we've done...there isn't just one solution, obviously, there's an infinite number of solutions, and that's why the testers are such an integral part. With a game like this, you have to account for many different scenarios.

IG: Are there going to be different scenarios?

Mike: That's one of the things I'm doing in this last push before beta, is I'm building about four scenarios. I'm going to go with a more standard throwback approach to the scenarios, where you get a nice big situation and you're told what's going to happen and it happens, and then the game goes forward from there. There's going to be at least four scenarios: There's gonna be a Dante one, where Hell's set up in these nice concentric rings, well, you can't really have spheres in these nice two-dimensional boards. We've worked something out that looked kind of weird and vaguely Dantesque...there'll be a few others that I've come up with, which will set up some bad situations.

IG: Thank you for speaking with us today. In closing is there anything random you would like to say?

Mike: Afterlife is going to be the single strangest game you're going to play this year.

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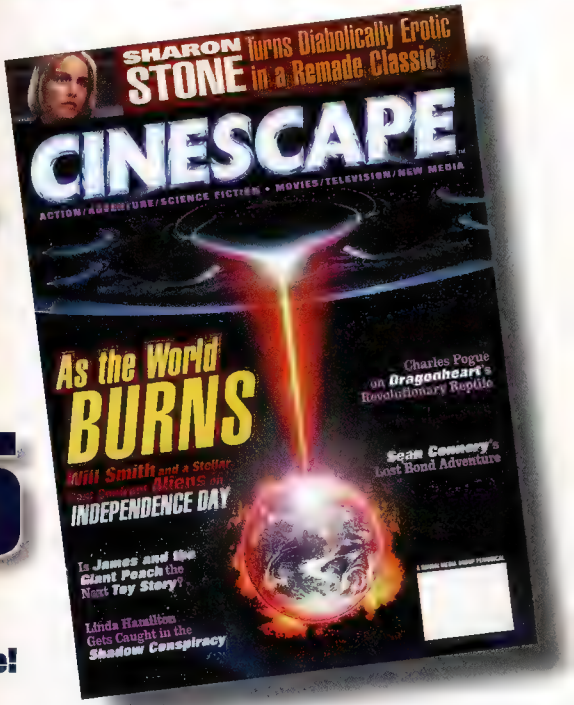

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AGF056

▶ True to Origin's style, Jane's Longbow features highly detailed 3-D graphics, based on actual data from McDonnell Douglas and Jane's of London.

Jane's Longbow

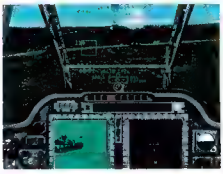
Jane's of London teams up with Origin for the company's first "real" flight sim

Publisher: Origin
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Origin
Release: May

Jane's of London has long been known as the keeper of the most accurate and up-to-date information on the world's military equipment. Thus, it was only a matter of time before some company decided to join forces with Jane's to produce a highly accurate, intensely researched sim. That company was Origin. With help from its parent company, Electronic Arts, the first two products under the Jane's label are due out soon.

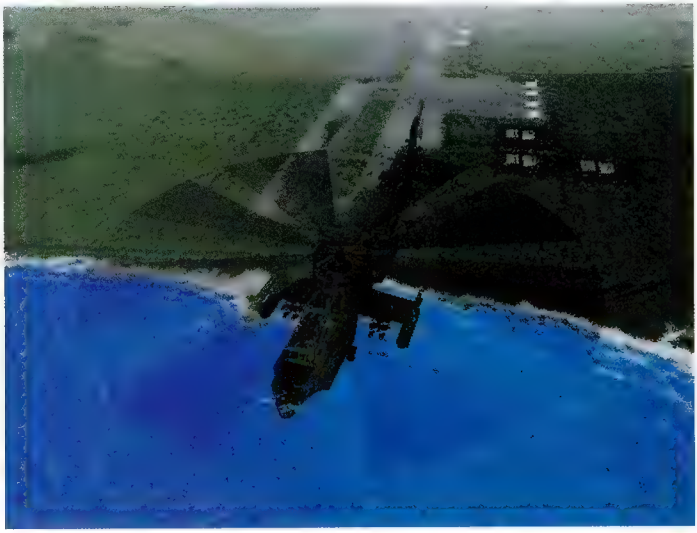
Origin's Jane's Longbow, designed by veteran ex-Microprose sim-designer Andy Hollis, is the most impressive. (The other title is Jane's ATF, a jet fighter sim from Electronic Arts, which should be out by April.) With lush graphics, authentic sounds and world data, input from actual Apache pilots and the incredible resources of Jane's, Longbow may well redefine the category of helicopter simulations. *IG* recently spent the day at Origin with Andy Hollis to get a sneak-peek of this hot title. Here's what we uncovered.

In high-detail SVGA (the game can also be played in standard VGA), the graphics are lush and highly detailed. Each object in the game is a highly detailed 3-D object drawn from the Jane's data (see sidebar). However, you'll need a fast Pentium with plenty of RAM to display this at a high frame rate. Of course, the detail settings are adjustable, with several different features that can be disabled to increase game speed. There is no optimum frame rate, however, according to producer Hollis, since "each person will accept something different. The frame rate I like might be too low for you and vice versa. So we give the player a lot of options to customize to what he wants."

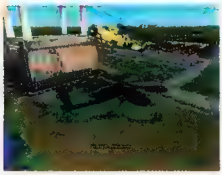


▲ The designers of Jane's Longbow actually got to sit inside a real Apache in order to accurately duplicate the layout of controls and displays in the game.

The player's Apache is also rich in detail, with an authentic cockpit layout that's identical to the real Apache. The video shows function and display data just like the real thing, and each of the four different HUD (heads-up display) Modes mimics its real-world counterpart. When the player hops out to an external view, he'll find the same careful attention to detail as he watches the chain gun move and realign itself as it tracks different targets. For an unfinished game, Jane's Longbow displayed some impressive graphics and detail. The opening intro is a dazzling SGI-



◀ Background scenery in Longbow is nearly seamless, since it doesn't use tiled texture-maps to render the terrain.



▲ Ground targets are rendered using high-resolution texture maps with the same attention to detail as the aircraft in Longbow.

rendered animation that's gorgeous to watch. "I wanted the customer to have something right out of the box, something to say, 'wow' about, that he felt he was getting his money's worth." Hollis says that the final version will have even more detail.

For the Full Campaign Mode of the game, actual live-action video segments were taped. Done primarily in the form of a newscast shown between missions (designed to keep you informed of the progress of the war), it progresses from a generic local newscast to a

With the incredible resources of Jane's, Longbow may redefine the category of helicopter sims.

CNN-like major network as the situation in the Balkans turns into a shooting war. Each of these segments is professionally done, and the local newscaster is Origin's own PR Manager, David Swofford, who was an actual newscaster before joining Origin. Displayed using Origin's new movie player, the images are crisp and detailed, and play smoothly.

To accompany impressive visuals, you need good sound, so Hollis and the Longbow team actually went out and taped an Apache live-fire exercise. Sound samples were then taken off this tape, so

Inside Origin's Tech Support

While we were visiting Origin, *IG* had a chance to stop in and chat with the QA (Quality Assurance) department, which has the responsibility of testing products and dealing with the technical support questions from thousands of frustrated gamers. At Origin, the QA department is one big, dark room filled with dozens of cubicles and the sound of several different games being played at once. Most of the cubicles are occupied by the testers for the various games who are busy hunting down the latest bugs, but a few are manned by hard-working folks that are often a customer's only contact with a company. Monty Kerr was gracious enough to take a few minutes from a hectic schedule to speak with *IG*.

IG: What, in essence, is your job?

Kerr: [illegible] online support of Origin products. That includes things like AOL, CompuServe and the Internet.

IG: So how many questions do you get a day?

Kerr: Around 1800-3000. Right now, though, it's a lot higher because of Wing Commander IV. Usually, when we have a big new release, it gets a lot higher for the first few months, then dies back down. Actually, I still get lots of questions from gamers trying to run older games, like Ultima II, or Wing Commander. It's usually "this game runs way too fast." I deal with that stuff a lot.

IG: What's the average turnaround? How fast do you try to get a response back to the customer?

Kerr: Usually 48 hours. I'll put us up against any other company; I think we do a good job of getting back to the customer. We also go through all the message bases and newsgroups trying to find Origin games. We now use the AOL multithreaded messages for instance, that let us send an e-mail response directly to a customer who posted a problem without having to dig through a ton of messages to find the answer to his question. Ideally, we'd like to cut it down to around [illegible] in on questions and e-mail over the weekend while we're at home so we won't have a couple thousand messages in our inbox when we get in on Monday, so it's a fairly constant job.

IG: What kinds of support can customers find?

Kerr: We've just finished updating our web page and AOL sections with new Wing IV stuff. We've got dozens of pages of problems and possible solutions for different games that the customer can look through for an instant response. They can also phone us, or send us e-mail through any of the major online services or the Internet.

IG: I've sent a few questions to you guys myself, and I know that once or twice I haven't held back in my complaints. Yet every time, I've still gotten a nice, polite reply to my problem or complaint. I'm sure you get the occasional scathing note–how do you deal with that?

Kerr: (smiling) Well, we've all been there before. We've all been playing a game, and gotten frustrated, and so we understand; we're gamers too. There's been times when we were playing a game, and we've run into a bug, or had the computer lock up ourselves, and you just get frustrated because you just want to play the game. So we understand; we've all been through it.

IG: What's the most common problem you have to deal with?

Kerr: Mostly memory problems. Either it's not set up correctly, or the customer doesn't have enough of the right kind. We try to get people to send us their configuration files, and we try to find the problems and suggest ways to fix them. A lot of the time, the best solution is a bootdisk, but it's hard to get people to make one. They're afraid they'll mess up their computer, or that it's too much trouble. And of course with a game like Ultima 7, which uses Voodoo [a proprietary Origin memory manager], you've almost got to have a bootdisk. But that's probably the most common problem.

IG: Thanks for taking the time to speak with us. You've given us a good insight into what goes on behind the scenes in QA. Hopefully, people can now appreciate the hard work you guys do a little better.

Kerr: You're welcome. Thanks for stopping by.

▲ [illegible]

▼ Check out the beautiful box cover Origin has designed for Longbow—that's the actual helicopter in motion.

The sounds the player will hear as he launches a rocket are the authentic sounds of that weapon system.

Modes of Play

The game will have four basic play modes: the Tutorial, Historical Missions (from Desert Storm and Operation: Just Cause) missions (which are randomly generated according to a set of player-selected criteria) and a Full Campaign based in the Balkans.

Origin's tutorial is one of Longbow's most innovative features. Though the game will feature a roughly 250-page manual, the player should be able to fly the Apache without ever cracking the manual. The player can work through a series of tutorial missions that are designed to familiarize him with all the controls, avionics and weapon systems of the Apache. Basically, the player will be flying with an instructor pilot, represented by a voice, who will explain and highlight the various systems, get him to try things and then nag him and offer advice until he does it right. By the time the player has gone through all the tutorial missions, he should be ready to handle some single missions and get in practice before tackling the Full Campaign Mode.

The historical missions are all actual missions drawn from Desert Storm and Operation Just Cause (Panama)—in fact, these missions are drawn directly from the actual operations orders for these missions. Though not many people are aware of it, says Hollis, "Apaches actually fired the first shots of Desert Storm. They went in and took out the early warning systems for the F-117s coming in behind them. This initial mission is included in the historical missions for Desert Storm, along with 11 other missions, six each from Desert Storm and Operation Just Cause.

Single missions will bring up a screen allowing the player to choose from several options in order to determine the type of mission he flies. He can choose the skill levels of his enemies, the model of Apache he wants to fly (AH-64A or AH-64D Longbow), the type of mission, even the conditions of the fight. Since the game generates these randomly, it will substantially increase Longbow's replayability. "I've never liked games that just gave you a series of missions and that's it," notes Hollis. "The random generator lets the player play all the missions he wants, it doesn't stale."

The Full Campaign Mode is set in the Balkans, and basically pits the West against the East. The CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) makes moves on Poland and the West is forced to respond, first politically, then with an increasingly aggressive response that eventually breaks into combat. Does anyone else see shades of World War II here? Initially, you're given reconnaissance missions with strict rules-of-engagement orders not to fire. Be careful to pay attention to and follow those rules-of-engagement, however, as they will be very important. "Few games actually use rules-of-engagement correctly, but they're very important in the modern world," says Hollis. "You can inadvertently start a major war by firing at the wrong time before the West is prepared, which will quickly put you on the losing path."

However, as tensions build, things will begin to break down and you'll get combat missions. You'll get war updates between missions from the news networks, so you'll quickly gather some idea of your progress. If you screw up enough, the war will soon be over with the outcome unfavorable to the West. If the player stumbles onto the losing path, he won't have to wait long before the game ends. "If you're not very good, it'll dump you pretty quickly. There's no need to keep dragging along if you can't hack it," explains Hollis.

◀ **Your wingman will actually be useful in this game, since you have the ability to select different weapons loadouts for him. He will also be able to prioritize targets correctly and alter his battle plan when the situation changes.**

the sounds the player will hear as he launches a rocket (or another weapon) are the authentic sounds of that weapon system. The soundtrack promises to be pulse-pounding and extensive use of voice should also contribute to the authentic feel.

You'll fly your missions with a wingman, and Longbow will give the player a good amount of control over his comrade. As in the real Apache, the player can take his mouse and draw a box around a group of targets, creating a priority fire zone. He can then engage the targets in that zone himself (as the pilot attacks each target in a priority fire zone, the computer automatically switches to the next target in that zone), or he can assign that zone to his wingman. The player will also be able to choose a different weapons load-out for his wingman, which means you can give your wingman plenty of unguided rockets to hit soft targets while you take Hellfires to deal with the heavy stuff, or any other way you wish to split the firepower. Hollis says that the AI for your wingman is pretty advanced and that he'll be able to prioritize threats and deal with a changing situation.

The game will also include a few little extras such as the VCR, which will record your flights for later study. In fact, if you fail a mission, you will go to a screen that includes the option to view tape of that mission. If you view that tape from this screen, you can actually jump back in the cockpit and fly the mission from that point at any time and fix any mistakes you may have made. This isn't realistic, but it can cut down on some frustration. It's a real pain to have to redo a tough mission that took 10 tries to complete just because you screw up on the landing. You can cut straight to the chase with this feature and avoid having to replay the entire mission.

Another few extras are the actual promotional videos provided by Apache manufacturer McDonnell Douglas that you can view from the VCR room, as well as the special electronic version of Jane's included in the game. In this special version of Jane's, every vehicle used in the game is listed along with the text in its entirety from the latest Jane's volume. A rotating 3-D model of the object is also provided with the entry that can be moved and zoomed in and out, allowing the player to see some of the incredible detail that went into this game.

Yet one more extra is the use of a remappable keyboard, which will allow players to choose which keys

▼ Rendered cinematics between levels add to the "wow" factor in Longbow.

do what. Players will be able to customize and shift the functions of the keys to their liking, and will be able to save up to four different keyboard maps (enough to allow different family members to have their own custom keyboard maps). An interesting additional feature is that Longbow will include keymaps from several other games that can be loaded up. This will be of obvious benefit to players used to the control scheme of other sims such as Apache.

All in all, with tons of features and lots of little extras, Jane's Longbow shows a lot of potential. Though unfinished, the portion of the game that I was able to play played smoothly and looked quite good. I was impressed with the level of detail Hollis has put into this game, and since Hollis believes attention to detail is vital, it should only get better as release approaches. Will the final product meet expectations? Will it be Hollis' crowning achievement, or will it be another also-ran? Will Origin finally achieve some respect from the flight-simulation community? In May, legions of dedicated gamers will provide the answer to those questions as Jane's Longbow hits store shelves. Keep an eye out for it; this title looks to be one of the hits of 1996.

—Jon Daughtridge

All in all, with tons of features and lots of little extras, Jane's Longbow shows a lot of potential.

▼ The AH-64D Apache Longbow is a formidable vehicle with laser-guided missiles and an independently tracking chain gun.

Andy Hollis and Origin's Quest

Creating

Andy Hollis is responsible for several of the more famous classic flight simulations created during the glory days of Microprose. Among his credits are Gunship, F-19 Stealth Fighter and F-15 Strike Eagle II and III, all of which are now located in the gaming Hall of Fame. A couple of years ago, things started going badly for Microprose, and Hollis left to pursue the perfect flight simulator elsewhere—Origin shrewdly snapped up the veteran and asked him to put Origin's name on the flight-sim map. Hollis agreed and looked for the right subject, finally settling on the AH-64D Apache Longbow, an earlier model of which he had already worked on in Gunship. Thus, Jane's Longbow was born.

The Longbow Team

▲ The level of detail in this game is impressive, right down to what you see between missions. MREs, anyone?

http://www.ea.com/ janes/ah-64d_longbow/index.html

for the Industry Leader

Longbow

Up until this project, Origin's success in the flight-simulator genre has been mixed, putting aside the Wing Commander series and its spin-off, which are based on a futuristic space setting. Strike Commander, though graphically impressive, was not a true flight sim; like all other [illegible] Origin games, it was primarily a game wrapped up in a game engine, though it was not a bad engine by any means. Strike Commander sold well and pushed machines of the time to the limit. It also had the distinction of being almost two years late. The follow-up to Strike Commander, Pacific Strike, had its share of playability and technical problems, and it never lived up to expectations.

Origin's most recent entry into the atmospheric flight-sim arena was Wings of Glory, based on World War I. Wings of Glory was moderately successful, but once again was primarily a game engine wrapped around a story rather than a true simulation. The accuracy and attention to detail found in true flight sims just wasn't there, so when Origin hired Andy Hollis, this goal became his primary charge: Make a true, accurate flight simulation living up to the Origin name and reputation for top-quality graphics and sounds. In this case, however, Origin was willing to forego some of the story in exchange for a top-notch flight sim engine that fans of the genre would embrace. Hollis had his work cut out for him, and Jane's Longbow became the vehicle with which he would try to stake a claim in the genre for Origin.

It was a formidable assignment, and Hollis soon discovered he had direct competition from Interactive Magic's Apache (helmed by another ex-Microprose employee, "Wild Bill" Stealey). Apache proved to be a good game and a hit for Interactive Magic, putting more pressure on Hollis. However, he rose to the challenge and immediately found himself facing a question—[illegible] the recent Longbow [illegible] would have to beat Apache in almost every facet, so Hollis and his team decided to concentrate on these elements: accuracy, detail, and [illegible] out of his buck," as Hollis refers to it. Of course they couldn't forget the top-notch graphics and sound that Origin is famous for, so they had to include that in their plans as well. If they could pull it all off, however, Hollis and Origin knew they would have a hit on their hands.

Last July, the project received a significant boost. When Jane's, Electronic Arts and Origin announced a licensing agreement [illegible] opened up a wealth of information for the Longbow team, giving the product a strong boost in terms of accuracy and detail. Jane's has provided some very substantial and near-exclusive information for the project, and gave Hollis access to their vast network of contacts and sources. For those who are not familiar with them, Jane's of London is considered to be the world's foremost experts on military equipment worldwide. Each piece of equipment is researched in extensive detail, and in many [illegible] information provided directly by the manufacturer. Though they do not have access to classified information, Jane's is known for making astonishingly accurate "guesses" to cover the information left out. Jane's is an old company, and has strong ties to most of the manufacturers, often having the exclusive access [illegible] a blessing for the Longbow team.

With the help of Jane's and other contacts, Hollis managed to get information on the Apache direct from the manufacturer, McDonnell Douglas, and the U.S. Army, including a set of authentic AH-64A Apache manuals. McDonnell Douglas also provided the team with several of the promotional videos designed to sell the Apache to prospective governments. In fact, Hollis decided to include several of these videos in the game itself, once again in an attempt to "give the customer more bang for his buck." His team was even allowed to get inside a real Apache cockpit in order to accurately place the gauges, displays and other equipment in their places. An Apache live-fire exercise was also taped and used to supply many of the sounds in the game.

Hollis also managed to secure several [illegible] instructor, from nearby Fort Hood to provide input and feedback on the game. These pilots [illegible] Hollis volunteered [illegible] and [illegible] really flew, including the little idiosyncrasies that distinguished the Apache from other helicopters. These pilots have been [illegible] throughout the project. Their feedback led to direct changes in the game's flight model. As Hollis relates, "Actually, these guys flew Cobras [Huey Cobras, another U.S. attack helicopter]). When [illegible] a little too crisp. That's how the Cobras flew. So, we had to go back and make it a little more sluggish." Such input should make Jane's Longbow the most accurate Apache sim in the 'what does it really feel like to fly one of these babies?' department. The flight model also accurately models helicopter rolls and loops, which can indeed be done, though in rather a different manner than a plane. Most sims model helicopter rolls and loops the same as a jet plane, says Hollis, and "it's totally different. As you roll over and the helicopter turns inverted, you start losing altitude fast and diving toward the ground, then you kind of [illegible] self again as it flips. You lose altitude, so you don't want to try this too low, but that's how you do it in a helicopter."

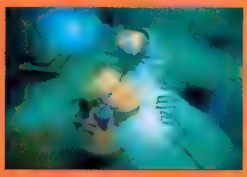
Of course, good graphics can be instrumental in the illusion of making the player feel as if he is really in the cockpit. Consequently, Hollis wanted to make sure the graphics on Longbow would be as realistic and accurate as possible while still being visually appealing. A whole new engine was built from scratch, and authentic USGS (United States Geological Survey) data was used to create all the terrain maps in the game. There are four main terrain areas in the game, and each is "one huge texture map rather than tiled textures," according to Hollis. This makes for seamless terrain and gives the player plenty of [illegible]

▲ Andy Hollis, Producer.

Origin was willing to forego some of the story in exchange for a top-notch flight-sim engine that fans of the genre would embrace.

◀ [illegible]

▲ [illegible]



▲ [illegible]

▶ Close your eyes for a moment and think back to Sega's Virtua Racing in arcades, and then consider the Genesis, 32X and Saturn versions. Formula One Racing has come a long way...

Formula One Racing

Psygnosis shifts into third gear with high-speed F-1 racing, PlayStation style

Publisher: Psygnosis
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Bizarre Creations
Release: Late summer/early fall

Up until the release of Sony's PlayStation and Sega's Saturn, there was no such thing as a "close" port of an arcade racing game. Simple sprite scaling was beyond the ability of the Genesis, Super NES and TurboGrafx, and neither the 3DO nor the Jaguar attempted to port any of the myriad of suitable arcade racing titles which might show off their increased powers in this area. Hundreds of titles, largely within Sega's library of racers (Power Drift, Rad Mobile, Super Monaco GP, Turbo Out Run) were either never attempted on consoles or hacked down into forms which hardly resembled their high-powered arcade brethren, and home gamers, with nowhere else to go, turned to other genres instead.

Once Ridge Racer, Destruction Derby, WipeOut, Daytona USA and Sega Rally were spotlighted in the media, home racing games suddenly began to take on a high profile within the media. Their popularity on the steady increase, driving simulations—alongside fighting games—have become the de facto standard for developers to showcase the capabilities of next-generation hardware both in the arcades and on home consoles.

Unfortunately, many companies have failed to take the necessary steps to construct something more than visual demonstrations, and what players have ended up with are eye-pleasing products which lack the substance to keep them coming back for more.

Psygnosis, on the other hand, has made large strides in the last year toward rebuilding a reputation damaged by producing too much eye candy and too little game for the dollar. Their newest titles are intended to provide a substantial amount of playability and replayability, and WipeOut, which demonstrated the company's more balanced combination of hot graphics and gameplay, had all of the ingredients to satisfy most gamers' demands...except the number of tracks, which Psygnosis agrees will now have to be remedied in their WipeOut sequel.

Formula One Racing improves on WipeOut by leaps and bounds in several key ways. What you have here is a racing title which includes every real F-1 driver from every team, every Grand Prix circuit replicated to a tee, commentary from the voice of U.K. Formula One (Murray Walker) and licensed rock soundtracks from Joe Satriani and Steve Vai.

Yet what's most impressive about F-1 Racing is not the inclusion of real drivers and the real circuits; anyone with the appropriate license could have done that

▲ Television-style camera angles are taken directly from actual camera positions licensed by Psygnosis from Fuji Television in Japan. Even in this early preview version of the game, the textured roads and cars look outstanding.

The accuracy, realism and overall attention to detail are very evident even at this stage of development.

◀ Compare the number of polygons and texture quality seen here, during the game, to the mocked-up rendered car bodies in the accompanying sidebar.

much. What will impress players: the accuracy, realism and overall attention to detail that are very evident even at this stage of development. The 17 circuits (ranging from 3.3 to 7 km in length), which consist of between 60,000 and 90,000 total polygons and have 256 color backdrops, were modeled from the official surveyor's track maps and data, and over100 hours of video footage were also studied to aid in the visual references (buildings, grandstands, trees, etc). All 26 cars were modeled from team diagrams, photographs and video footage, and use the official logos and sponsors—everything except tobacco ads—on both car and circuit models.

Joe Satriani and Steve Vai have each provided tracks for F-1's race soundtrack.

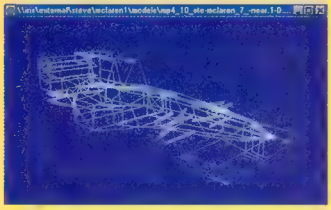
To cater to both the arcade racing fan and also fans of simulators, F-1 includes two separate modes—Arcade and Grand Prix. Arcade Mode will allow you to get in the car and race without the need to worry about car setups and technical matters dealing with the car's operation. The car's handling in this mode is responsive

▲ **Bearing in mind the complexity of the car model and the nicely rounded track, it's always surprising to find detailed texture-mapped polygonal artwork on the roadsides. The tracks are as full of objects as Super Monaco GP's.**

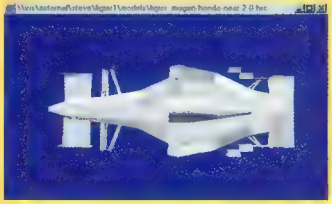
and intuitive, adding features of an arcade racer (such as power slides) to the mix. Grand Prix Mode on the other hand competes favorably with Papyrus' PC offerings (Indy Car Racing I & II and NASCAR Racing) since it serves as a place for advanced drivers to define the way they want to play. Options include car setup, race strategy, pit strategy, tire and refueling stops, etc.

▶ **Psygnosis has used three entirely different developers in the creation of its PlayStation driving games. United Kingdom-based development houses were responsible for Destruction Derby (Reflections) and WipeOut; the men and women of the Liverpool England-based Bizarre Creations, developers of Formula One Racing, are shown here.**

Creating the Formula One Experience for the New Generation of Hardware



▲ **A wireframe image of the car is constructed by the developers or purchased from a company specializing in the creation of computerized models of real-world objects.**



▲ **The outlines of the body are filled in with flat shading to give the designer a view of the solid object's actual bulk.**

▲ **Decals are scanned from actual sticker and promotional artwork and "cleaned up" by editing, color correcting and simplifying the scans in a program such as Photoshop. They're applied to the car's body, which winds up looking like this.**

The development of a 3-D motion simulation game can be easy—ask HAL Laboratories, the makers of the early Super NES title Hyper Zone, a title which eliminated every aspect of 3-D movement except for forward progress and attempted to satisfy players with simple aim and shoot gameplay On the other hand, you have Bizarre Creations, which has been entrusted by Psygnosis with the task of giving life to the PlayStation's most realistic console driving game to date.

Unlike Hyper Zone—and for that matter, most other console racers, Formula One Racing will depend heavily on real-life models to re-create several different elements of the F-1 driving experience Sampled sound effects, actual tire, engine, wind foils, suspension dynamics, and Fuji television's authentic F-1 race camera views will be duplicated to give the action realism and a television-broadcast quality.

The most evident models to the average player, however, will be the graphic models used for the racecars and their surroundings. When developers sit down to re-create real places for 32- and 64-Bit games, the creation of in-game buildings, cars and decals, requires several different but equally important skills Back in the days of eight- and 16-Bit driving games, artwork was mostly drawn by hand and mouse with simple pre-Photoshop graphics tools or increasingly in the later days of 16-Bit software scanned in from photographs or converted from workstation pre-rendered flat images into sprite and background art. Texture-mapped polygon graphics take a bit more work to create.

A polygonal building for background art is relatively easy: Rather than taking the time to make doors that open and rooms that can be explored, developers just draw a simple 3-D box and add a boxy or triangular roof. Simple brick or stucco textures (often taken from scanned photos) are applied to the sides of the box, and light blue or yellow-lit windows will often be drawn into the texture, reducing the need for additional polygons.

Cars are tricky. Developers can either construct the wireframe models using photographs or blueprints of the actual vehicles, or buy completed models from companies such as Viewpoint Datalabs (see *IG's FUSION*, issue eight). Tools such as Microsoft's Softimage (pronounced soft-ee-mah-juh) enable developers to take exceedingly complex models (which would be complete with rounded edges, tire bolts and all sorts of extra frills made evident in elaborate pre-rendered sequences) and flatten them for use in a realtime 3-D environment.

Heavy doses of attention were also given to in-car sound effects which were taken from a DAT recorder strapped to a driver's body. A dynamically calculated Doppler effect for TV cameras, passing and in-car effects continues to add to the realism. As mentioned before, tracks from Joe Satriani and Steve Vai were licensed for inclusion in the soundtrack, and 12 specifically designed tracks from Overdrive will also be included. In the version *IG* previewed, music was in fact playing during the actual race so Satriani and Vai's magnificent work will luckily not be limited to the game's menus (a la Road Rash). Dolby Surround Sound and Q-Sound, an effect (see *IG's Fusion* Buzz Word, last month) used to simulate surround sound through two speakers, will both be included to give the game's sound effects a three-dimensional feel.

Like IndyCar and NASCAR Racing on the PC before it, F-1 has a variety of possible viewpoints which range from in the cockpit, behind the car, helicopter view, overhead, beside the car to a camera mounted on the nose of the car. Possibly the most interesting licensing deal arises here: Fuji Television (who is the official broadcaster of F-1) provided the license to Psygnosis which allows them to use the official and exact camera positions which Fuji uses to broadcast Formula One races. This speaks for itself: It's quite apparent that Psygnosis and Bizarre are doing everything in their power to create the most realistic F-1 experience yet.

When it comes to Two-player Options, one thing is for sure; linkup will definitely be in while a split-screen option is still under consideration. The developers are already pushing the limits of the machine and right now the decision on whether or not to include split-screen will be based on just how significant the trade offs are—cutting the number of polygons on each side of the screen detracts from the game's

▲ Formula One Racing may take the trophy for most promotional advertisements ever in a home video game. Real F-1 sponsors are a part of the game experience...except for tobacco adverts

◀ Seventeen of the world's authentic Formula One tracks have been reconstructed using somewhere between 60,000 and 90,000 polygons for each track's data alone.

Racing Spins into the Mid-'90s

Pole Position, Hang-On, F-Zero and Uniracers: Each name should conjure up a distinct image of what "racing" has meant to a different generation of video gamers, and each has attempted to tackle the "racing" genre from a different angle.

Pole Position was Namco and Atari's early attempt to duplicate the excitement of Formula One race circuits with 3-D sprite-based graphics. Conversions of the game and/or its much-too-similar sequel Pole Position II appeared across each of Atari's console and computer platforms, and ironically enough nostalgic Japanese gamers have been snatching up an "arcade perfect" Pole Position port recently released on a Namco Museum disc for Sony's PlayStation. PP's modern heirs range from Namco's own Ace Driver and Victory Lap arcade titles to Sega's Virtua Racing and Indy 500 to even Psygnosis' F-1 Racing, all of which have taken the classic concept to new heights with polygonal artwork.

Sega's Hang-On, a now-classic arcade motorcycle simulation, adopted a comfortable third-person over-the-shoulder view for use in open-ended races which took players through hundreds of miles of sparse, similar scenery.

Racing isn't only F-1and stock cars; bikes, horses and hovercrafts ride too.

Ported for the Sega Master System and later enhanced for both coin-op and Genesis sequels as Super Hang-On, the original game helped to sire a new generation of motorcycle race titles:

▲ Manx T.T. Super Bike may fare even better at home than it will in arcades: Though the Japanese design team has said that the arcade machine's special control scheme (a fully moving bike body) will hinder a coin-op to home translation, the sluggishness of the body's response could be eliminated with a joypad

Namco's Cyber Cycles and Sega's recently debuted Manx T.T. Super Bike are the most noteworthy attempts to translate Hang-On's appeal into 3-D polygonal worlds.

Nintendo's F-Zero was the first console racing game to use true scaling (a Mode 7 3-D ground surface) and among the first to bring hovercrafts into use as racecars. Nintendo's futuristic ships hovered above the surfaces of the tracks and vaulted off of strategically placed ramps, all in scenes which combined gritty gray tracks with deep blue, red, green and yellow scenery. In the last year, Psygnosis' WipeOut has taken F-Zero's concept to the 32-Bit level with fully polygonal artwork and more thoroughly conceived settings, and Konami's Speed King a Japan-only arcade release which could hopefully see the light of day here on a next-generation console—has taken the theme even further with an extremely expensive ($150,000) moving cabinet and a high-powered

"wow" factor. On that note, one impressive feature should be mentioned: When using the Link Option, it's possible to conduct a one-player game using a regular viewpoint on one monitor while using the Fuji TV cameras on another

graphics engine is firmly in place. The amount of detail and accuracy for each circuit—considering the 30 frame per second updating—is simply staggering when first viewed. Watching other drivers racing realistically in a colorful, 3-

▲ Options look deceivingly standard as a result of Bizarre and Psygnosis' simple interface. Real F-1 teams and drivers can be easily accessed, as can multiple control schemes, audio tracks and saved game data

Bizarre Creations even considered support for Sony's mouse, but quickly ditched plans for that peripheral.

The developers are also striving to make the most out of the current line of Sony hardware and peripherals: The standard control pad is supported, as are the Namco NeGcon and the newly released Mad Katz analog steering wheel and pedal set. (The developers even tried driving with the mouse, but ditched plans for that peripheral rather quickly—it's a big step down from any sort of precise control.) You'll also want to make sure you have some memory card space open, as F-1 will save best times, season details and stats, custom car setups and replays.

Although a number of items were absent in the revision we tested (some tracks, Walker's comments, some music, etc), the basic

◀ Here's where you can really see the combination of all of the track's aesthetic elements: Fences overlap trees, which overlap layers of buildings.

D texture-mapped world was a first-time experience on this end, and the level of fluid realism is a testament to the work that went into the game

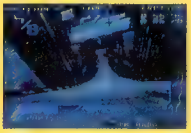
When Psygnosis and Bizarre Creations release F1 this fall, racing fans will finally have the chance to play an authentic 3-D Formula One experience at home

Dan Hughes

http://www.sepc.sony.com/SEPC/ Psygnosis/games/formula1.html

texture-mapping arcade board. Two people can sit in the Speed King cabinet at once as it spins fully around and tilts upward and downward to simulate actual hovercraft movement, but the price tag is a major deterrent: Japanese prices are $5 for a single player and $8 for two at once—good luck earning the purchase price back.

Later in the Super NES' life cycle, DMA Design's Uniracers changed the definition of what players could expect from a racing game. Giving gamers a side-scrolling view of the action, Uniracers' themes were unicycle racing and the performance of skateboard-style tricks The latest



◀ Konami's futuristic Speed King arcade machine is built for two Like WipeOut, it takes the futuristic racing genre into entirely new directions with polygon graphics and fast, fluid on-screen motion

craze in Japan—one that probably won't be catching on in the United States—is horse racing, a genre which has been continually explored (with a variety of bizarre titles) by a number of Japanese 16-Bit and 32-Bit developers.

Saurus, a Neo•Geo developer, has just released Stakes Winner for the NG•CD, and it's a doozy: If participating in hundreds of races isn't fun enough, you'll just love watching cinematic scenes which take you through the good times and bad times of a horse's life... as if dating simulators, games based on mayonnaise and Super Deformed Bandai titles weren't enough to make you scratch your head in amazement

More aesthetically interesting is Tecmo's Gallop Racer, which at least uses the PlayStation's 3-D abilities to put you in a first-person view of the action, complete with polygonal horses and background artwork.

◀ Awwww...isn't it heart warming to see the little pony and its mother together in a stable? Not really. Horse racing simulations in Japan—this is Stakes Winner—have started to get into an obsessive level of detail about horse life.

▲ Virtua Horse? Close enough, it's Tecmo's Japanese release of Gallop Racer, a horse racing simulation with 3-D texture-mapped polygon graphics.

▶ More maneuverability, specifically a forward roll, is just one of the added features players will be privy to in No Regret.

Crusader: No Regret

Origin previews a pseudo-sequel to its surprise '95 action hit, complete with replay value

Publisher: Origin Systems/EA
Platform: PC
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Origin Systems
Release: Fall 1996

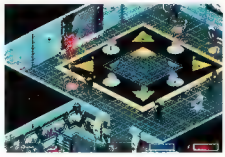
A little under a year ago, Origin released Crusader: No Remorse, an action game that was totally different from the action games of the day. Crusader's sales have blown away Origin's most gracious guesstimates, and quickly showed the rest of the industry that first-person action games were not going to conquer the industry single-handedly. Riding on the success of the first title and taking advantage of the art team's down time, Origin has set out to release Crusader: No Regret, a pseudo-sequel due in the fall of 1996. Repetitive though the title may sound, Crusader: No Regret promises to build on the now-familiar formula of the original title.

No Regret is a stand-alone game, despite its similarities to most add-on type packages, but is in fact equivalent in terms of explorable area and vastly greater in choices to be made within the game. No Regret's play time will be shorter than its forbear, but will offer extended replayability thanks to larger missions with multiple paths to completion, something missing almost entirely from the original game.

No Regret is entirely similar to its predecessor in appearance and gameplay, but adds new features and tweaks old ones. In addition to the new weaponry, players will have a much-needed forward roll maneuver added to the Silencer's already expansive repertoire of combat maneuvers. The new levels will contain more difficult and varied puzzles than those found in No Remorse, and the level designs will have greater variation as well, both visually and architecturally. Roughly 75 percent of No Regret's graphics will be new, all of which will be more detailed than those in No Remorse. For example, the drab sliding doors of the original will be replaced with iris and clamping doors, and the bland wall and floor art of the original will be similarly enhanced with more texturing and attention to detail. As far as level design is concerned, No Regret's levels will feature multiple paths which will all converge upon a single conclusion. Musically, Crusader will use the same outside composers that wrote the first game's techno soundtrack, Straylight Productions.

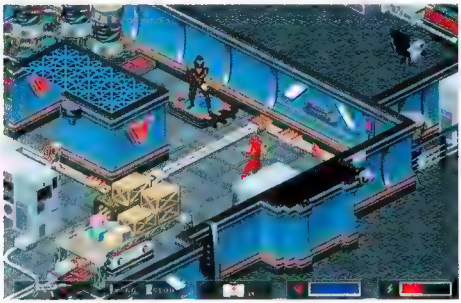
No Regret will also contain new FMV sequences, shot in Dallas' Las Colinas film studios. While still at a "B" level of concept, the FMV quality is a marked improvement over the original title's decidedly cheesy fare, despite some humorously redundant coughing, prosthetic-brandishing, and '80s clothing. No Regret's FMV will be compressed with Wing Commander IV's algorithm, giving players 16-Bit color depth and less artifacting than what was shown by the first title's mediocre compression scheme.

Despite the extra production values and improved compression, No Regret will expand on the original title's stress on informational FMV, almost completely eliminating the countless numbers of "I don't like you" video clips from the Rebel base. While reducing the total minute count to roughly 70 percent of the original's, No Regret will feature approximately the same number of clips. Unlike the first game, in which players could see 100 percent of the FMV by talking to the people in the bar, the relative non-linearity within the missions in No Regret makes it so players will not see all the FMV clips in one play through, as most



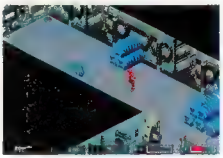
▲ Proving itself a formidable contender in the crowded waters of Doom clones, Crusader:No Remorse has offered players a unique break from first-person perspective shooters. No Regret promises more of the same.

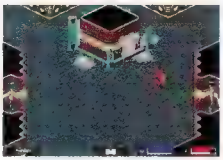
No Regret's play time will be shorter than its forbear, but will offer extended replayability thanks to larger missions with multiple paths to completion.



▼ Perhaps the greatest improvement over No Remorse will be the extended replayability. Several acceptable avenues may be taken in the quest.

▼ With a top down perspective, Crusader offers the same thrills as Doom minus the blocky graphics and the occasional dose of motion sickness.





The new levels will contain more difficult and varied puzzles than before.

are event and location triggered.

No Regret's story picks up immediately following the destruction of the WEC's Vigilance Platform at the end of the first game, with the lone Silencer still floating through space in a lifepod. Picked up by a freighter for the WEC's Lunar Mining Cartel, the lone hero must help the Resistance's efforts on the moon and hinder the production of Dicorealium, a radioactive mineral vital to the WEC's power plants on Earth. Out to stop his valiant efforts are the Chairman Nathanial Draygan, a holdover from the previous game (complete with new hair) and Mrs. Leech, the treacherous lady in charge of the lunar mine, continuing the series tradition for female villainy.

- Peter Bartholow

▲ A good amount of energy was put into improving the subtleties of many of the rooms and corridors throughout the game. Look for greater texture and detail in walls and floors.

http://www.ea.com/origin/english/index.html

Origin's Tony Zurovec Speaks: Crusader's Past and Present

IG: [illegible]

IG: [illegible]

"Crusader 2... will be designed as a multiplayer game from the ground up."

IG: [illegible]

▲ [illegible]

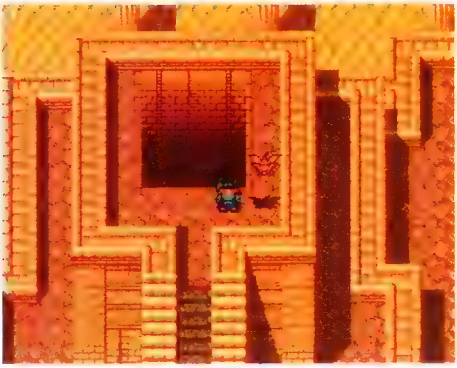
▶ In the import version of Beyond the Beyond, used for this preview, a turn-based and menu-driven interface brings enlarged characters into conflict with each other. Brilliant magic spells add color to a dark backdrop.

Beyond the Beyond

Sony reluctantly steps into the world of 32-Bit with conventional Japanese themes

Publisher: Sony CEA
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Camelot
Release: June '96

Ever since the announcement was made that Sony would be entering the video game market with a powerful new 32-Bit system, RPG fans have been crying out for the release of new "next-generation" role-playing games. With the exception of Asciiware's 3-D action-oriented King's Field, nothing resembling an RPG has been released in North America, and there have certainly been no old-fashioned RPGs brought here to date. After thousands of protesting e-mails and letters from pleading RPGers, however, Sony Computer Entertainment of America decided to release the first of what will hopefully be a long line of role-playing titles for the PlayStation—Beyond the Beyond.



▲ When you're not fighting battles, you'll be in overhead map-roaming scenes which strongly resemble Game Arts' Lunar: The Silver Star, a 16-Bit CD RPG.

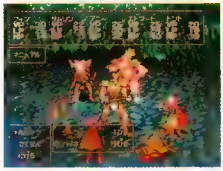
Beyond the Beyond is a true conventional Japanese-style RPG, not unlike such classics as Dragon Warrior or Phantasy Star, but with enhanced graphics and CD audio.

After thousands of e-mails and letters from protesting RPGers, SCEA decided to release their first U.S. RPG title: Beyond the Beyond.

Developed by Camelot, the PlayStation branch of Sonic Team (famed developers of the Shining Force series, as well as Shining Wisdom for the Sega Saturn), BtB features quite a few similarities to the older Sonic Team titles, even including the trademark little girl who greets you whenever you start or continue a game—that may sound weird, but if you've played any of the Shining Force games, then you know what I'm talking about.

The underlying basics of the game are similar to those of most other typical console RPGs: You fight monsters to build levels, speak to people in towns and castles to gain information and explore huge puzzle and trap-ridden dungeons to find valuable treasures. I'd love to be able to say that this is where the similarities to most 16-Bit role-playing games end, but unfortunately that's not the case. While it's not exactly "more of the same," Beyond the Beyond is certainly nothing revolutionary. However, the heart and soul of any good RPG is the story, and from what Sony has told us, the story is where Beyond the Beyond really shines.

In BtB you take the role of a 14-year-old boy named Finn. The game begins with Finn returning unconscious from his monthly training session with his father, Kevins (portrayed in the full-screen animated CG intro before the game). After breakfast the next morning, Finn is sent on a small journey to retrieve some Holy Water from a nearby cave. One thing leads to another, and suddenly a huge quest unfolds that spans numerous lands and uncovers various dangers.



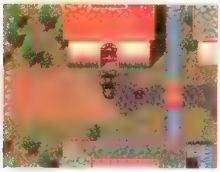
▲ The essence of any standard RPG is mastery of the various skills and spells at your party's disposal. As Beyond the Beyond forces you to fight plenty of battles, you'll get quite a few chances to learn the skills that pay the bills.

The first thing you'll notice about Beyond the Beyond is that the game is very battle-intensive. Rarely ever do you walk more than five steps without stopping to battle monsters. The battles are so frequent that it can begin to get tedious for those who have limited

patience. Battles take place in a 3-D environment, while the characters are all dual-sided 2-D images (for front and back views). There are multiple camera views that the player can switch between, and characters animate fairly nicely despite a very low frame rate and at times, high pixelization. The maximum amount of characters that can be in your party at once is five, and even with a full party there are no signs of slowdown

during battle, which is relieving.

The battle system was obviously well thought-out, as there are plenty of battle options available. First, there is a Strategy command that allows you to choose between five different battle strategies for your party, including one option that lets you choose each character's moves manually. Next, there is a new "Active Battle System," which involves pressing the circle button repeatedly during battle to enhance the effectiveness of your character's moves. Regular attacks may end up being double attacks, defenses may turn into counter-attacks, etc. Cheaters take note however—the computer can tell if you're using a rapid-fire controller



▲ **Walking, stalking and talking is made marginally more impressive than a Super NES game via the use of more detailed backgrounds and infrequent warping effects.**

and if so, the ABS system won't work.

Finally, in addition to Vitality Points (VP) and Magic Points (MP), characters now have Life Points (LP) as well. Life Points are crucial to party members as they are what keep you alive. If your Vitality Points reach zero, rather than dying, your character becomes groggy. After a few seconds (usually on the next turn) your character will use up some Life Points and regain consciousness with a limited amount of VP. This works wonderfully, because it effectively prohibits the occasional "accidental death" that is not uncommon in RPGs when a player doesn't realize that their Hit Points (or in this case Vitality Points) are low. Only after you use up all of your Life Points does your character actually die and become in need of revival at a local church.

The overworld graphics in Beyond the Beyond are nicely done. Basically, the effect is somewhat similar to that of Final Fantasy III, with a 3-D overhead constantly scaling view, except in BtB the ground actually rises and drops, creating a much more realistic 3-D feel. The attention to detail definitely shows; the mountains look very true to life, and since they actually have height now, they feel like, well, mountains (as opposed to the "painted" 2-D look of previous RPGs). The visual effect is truly splendid and hopefully more companies will use this type of overworld effect in future RPG software.

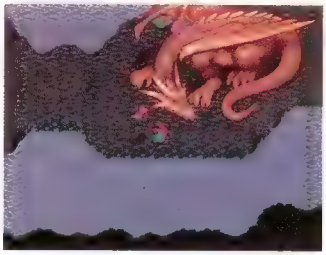
Castles and towns are laid out nicely, and have very colorful graphics, but admittedly nothing looks like it couldn't be done on a Super NES. In some areas a touch of 32-Bit shines through with neat backgrounds and warping effects, but compared to earlier next-generation titles like Magic Knight Rayearth for the Saturn, these

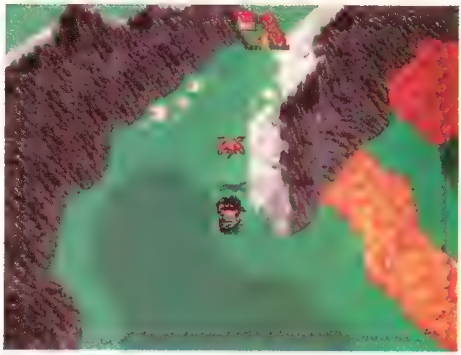
Camelot took the typical dungeon scenario and added much-needed spice in the form of puzzle elements that use both your brain and sword.

effects are limited in appeal.

Ultimately, the most promising aspect of Beyond the Beyond is the dungeons and how they are constructed. In most RPGs, the dungeons and caves are rather plainly laid out; monsters are tougher, and some useful treasure is thrown in to add some variety to the game, but otherwise these dungeons are generally boring. In Beyond the Beyond, however, Camelot took the typical dungeon scenario and added much-needed

▼ **If you can look at this scene and not see shades of Lunar, you're kidding yourself: Beyond the Beyond's appeal to RPG gamers will be its nostalgic duplication of the traditional elements which made eight- and 16-Bit RPGs popular.**





spice to it to provide increased exploration enjoyment. In almost every dungeon of BtB, there are puzzle-like elements involved that mandate the use of your brain, and not only your sword. For example, in an ancient temple there are walls that move when you step on special floor tiles, opening up new paths and revealing hidden areas.

In another area early on in the game, you travel through a huge tree, and the only way to advance is to push cleverly positioned acorns into open holes so you can pass through. Not only do these types of situations add to the challenge, but they are actually fun to take part in and help to create a more enjoyable experience when playing.

Ultimately, we'll have to wait for the final English version to come in before we can pass judgment on Beyond the Beyond. While it does have some nice features, most of the game looks to be generic RPG material. However, ask any real RPG fan and they'll tell you that an enthralling story can take a mediocre game and make it into something wonderful, and vice-versa. If the story is as good as Sony promises, they may have a hit on their hands after all.

One step in the right direction for Sony would be to

▲ **Outdoor scenery is similar to the graphics found in Final Fantasy III for the SNES; movement takes place in a slightly 3-D plane —mountains and valleys move in perspective as you walk.**

tone down the frequency of battles and raise the experience gained for each fight (to maintain balance throughout the game); and without a doubt—make sure that the translation is fully understandable before releasing the game. Many great Japanese RPGs were hurt by poor translation work, the most recent example being Capcom's Breath of Fire II which read like it wasn't even spell-checked. Hopefully, Sony will do the game justice and provide a full package worthy of its players' full attention. Look to *IG* for a full review as soon as the game is ready for release.

- John Ricciardi

http://www.sepc.sony.com/SCEA/ind...html

▶ One tiny bug was noticeable in the Beta—an extra-powerful Scorpion spear. The game is being fine-tuned and improved for release.

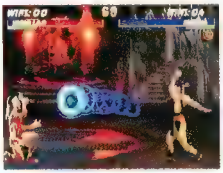
Ultimate MK3

Williams keeps the blood flowing with a Saturn shot in the arm

Publisher: Williams Entertainment
Platform: Sega Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Eurocom Development
Release: May '96

Williams has been attracting crowds to arcades for several straight years with their Mortal Kombat series, which for better or worse has stayed true to a standard formula: Take most of the characters from the last game, add in some new player fighters and Bosses, and then toss in some outrageous new fatalities, secrets and new types of finishing moves. The formula worked well when Mortal Kombat 2 was released, began to weaken a bit with MK3, and improved somewhat for Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3; a game which combines the vast majority of the characters found in the MK series, adding more moves, backgrounds and secrets than ever before.

You're most likely familiar with what MK3 had to offer, as it's been released on every platform save the 3DO, Saturn and Jaguar, and that precise fact played a part in securing a multi-month exclusive for UMK3 on the Saturn. Apparently, in some way a result of Acclaim's previous contract to translate Williams arcade games for home systems, Williams—a company always seeking wide distribution for its software—was instead bound by Acclaim's actions into an agreement to release MK3 as a 32-Bit six-month exclusive on the PlayStation when they had wanted to make it available for every machine under the sun. After giving Sony what they wanted, Williams opted to make it up to Sega by giving them a multi-month exclusive window on Ultimate MK3.



▲ Ultimate MK3 looks a lot like its PlayStation predecessor, but its extra backgrounds, characters and animation sequences give the game just enough "new" content to intrigue old fans.

Though the game is challenging to the average player even on the Novice level, the fourth Ultimate difficulty setting had one of the longest and most torturous competitions seen yet in an MK game.

▼ Enough characters? Their basic moves may be similar, but their special attacks and ranges differentiate MK's crew.

If you like to have multiple characters to choose from, UMK3 is your game. With the exception of Johnny Cage, Raiden and Baraka, UMK3 gives you all of the player characters from the MK series, including a huge variety of ninjas—two separate Sub Zeros (one in MK2 style, one in MK3), Scorpion, two Smokes (robot and human), Noob Saibot, Ermac, Mileena, Kitana, Jade, Cyrax and Sektor—plus everyone you remember from MK3, equipped with some new deadly moves, for a grand total of at least 22 player characters. A set of new backgrounds includes a desert scene, a hellish room with lava and columns of skeletons, Shao Kahn's cavernous throne room and a waterfront scene with collapsed bridges. The Saturn translation of UMK3 is generally identical to the earlier PlayStation

◀ The shadowy Noob Saibot receives a swift kick in the head from UMK3's dangerous human Smoke character.

MK3 release—the Beta we played has the same problems with Shang Tsung morphs (~four seconds), match loading time (~10 seconds) and the appearance of the word "Fight" (still just a little scaling effect), though Eurocom Development has used the Saturn's memory nicely to buffer transitional and menu screens to cut down on loading there. UMK3's play mechanics and control scheme have survived the translation intact, as have the backgrounds and the clear sound effects, though it remains to be seen whether the final version will retain all of the arcade game's voice samples. As you'd expect from a CD, the opening character portraits look just as they do

Variable difficulty levels allow you to choose how many opponents you'll face before Shao Kahn.

in the arcade, and luckily, the character animations are very smooth and impressive.

Multiplayer options, multiple difficulty levels and new endings are also new features in the home translation: A "four-player two-on-two kombat" mode and an "eight-player tournament" have players swapping joysticks to square off against one another. Though the game is challenging to the average player even on the Novice level, the fourth Ultimate difficulty setting has one of the longest and most torturous competitions seen yet in an MK game. Will Williams follow up with something even more challenging when the 3-D fighter War Gods comes out, or will we have to wait for MK4 before the Kombat continues?...

- Jer Horwitz

Three of *JG*'s editors sat down with UMK3 for an extended examination and found only one glaring visual change: The words 'Sega Saturn Beta Version' on the title screen...and they'll be removed for the game's final release. It's quite an impressive translation, except for Shang's morph...

http://www.wms.com

If you like to have multiple characters to choose from, UMK3 is your game.

THE NEW KAST

KITANA

MK2's fan-favorite fan-wielding daughter of Shao Kahn has returned to spread more blood in the home levels. [illegible]

REPTILE

Though he appeared in MK as the only hidden fighter in the [illegible]

JADE

Disappearing from MK2's secret fighter roster, Jade can evade any projectile attack using a temporary [illegible] [illegible] Could her huge flying [illegible] [illegible]

SCORPION

One of the original MK characters to return for UMK3, Scorpion's [illegible] and teleport [illegible] legendary in their [illegible] but [illegible] style. New "run" based blade slices are deadly.

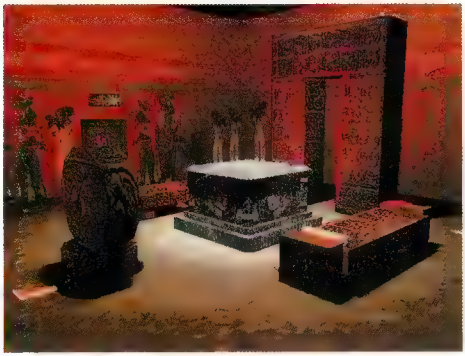
SMOKE

Returning from the [illegible] of MK2, Smoke is a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

ERMAC

ERMAC, a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

▶ Using an enhanced version of the Under a Killing Moon engine, Pandora allows you to walk around the various locations in realtime, unlike most in the "interactive movie" genre.



The Pandora Directive

Tex Murphy returns in Access Software's fourth futuristic detective story

Publisher: Access Software
Platform: PC CD-ROM
Format: 6 CD-ROMS
Developer: Access Software
Release: August '96

Tex Murphy is back in his fourth interactive adventure. He's slicker than ever thanks to an interactive multimedia production that advances the state of the art of computer gaming to spectacular new heights.

Access' own Chris Jones donned the trench coat one more time to search for an old friend of Tex Murphy's employer. One thing leads to another and Tex is plunged into the dark mystery of the incident at Roswell, N.M., and from there, to the Yucatan Peninsula, amid the Mayan ruins. The plot is intricate and huge—it takes six CDs to hold the game—fraught with murder, mayhem and jeopardy. There are clues to be found, people to question, components to find and assemble into the Pandora Device, and, as always, surprising revelations.

This terse description does nothing to convey the enormous stride this game represents. The graphics are top-drawer, with live actors against beautifully rendered backgrounds. The cast is straight out of Hollywood. Kevin McCarthy, as Gordon Fitzpatrick, hires Tex to find an old friend, played by John Agar. Tex gets help from a mysterious woman, played by Tanya Roberts, and Barry Corbin, an NSA agent, dogs his every step. This is heavy-muscle in the acting department, but the quality of the production goes deeper, behind the camera, to Adrian Carr, the Australian director of numerous films (*The Man From Snowy River*, *D.A.R.Y.L.* and *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, among others.)

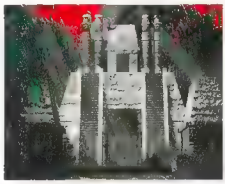
There are clues to be found, people to question, components to find and assemble into the Pandora device, and, as always, surprising revelations.

The impact of Carr's work is monumental. Gone are the larger-than-necessary moves, the exaggerated grimaces, the over-done mannerisms associated with games in the past. Instead, there is a gritty reality that pulls the gamer into the plot.

Carr explained that Access officials hadn't really known what they were getting into until they saw him work: "Originally I was hired to come in and direct the Hollywood actors. After I had done the first day's shooting, with low angles, high angles, medium shots, close-ups, they realized [what I was capable of]. One of them phrased it, 'We were used to having a McDonald's Big Mac; you have now given us a three-course gourmet meal.'" So Access decided to use his direction throughout the production.

The gamer chooses which of three narrative paths to follow. It's possible to play Tex as a nice guy, always making the socially correct decisions. There's also a medium road; Tex is sort of a gray character who might get his hands a bit mussed. Finally, there's the down-and-dirty path; play Tex this way, and the world gets tough and mean, and Tex faces hard choices.

This range of mood provides dramatic content unmatched by any other game. Carr explained: "We had one scene where Tex Murphy and Chelsea [his companion/helper] are in a pub. In one of the paths, she slaps him and



▲ Pandora features locations all over the world, from a high-rise apartment to the mysterious Yucatan Peninsula.

▼ Neon traces light the ceiling and floor of this club scene, which spotlight the attention to detail Access Software has given to these graphics.

storms out. In the other, she just looks at him and knows the relationship is over. They played the scene so convincingly that she started crying at the end. Chris came to me the next day; he felt so bad. He said he felt he had lost a friend. I said, 'Welcome to acting, Chris. She is probably high as a kite thinking what a performance!' That's when you realize the performance was honest."

It's an emotional trip, as Tex Murphy delves into the underworld and finds his own character tested, sometimes betraying his own standards of conduct. Pandora goes further than any other title to date to produce real gut-level response in the gamer. As Tex is wrung out by events, the player feels his pressure, explores with Tex the depths of feelings in his character. This is truly interactive theater, made more dramatic because it's so unexpected in the gaming media.

Chris Jones attained new heights in acting ability during this production. He got a lot of praise from Carr: "It must have been hard to hand the direction over to someone else..." But the crew at Access are "egoless," according to Carr. "Chris started to realize what honesty in a performance is. If it didn't ring true to him when he delivered lines, he'd ask to redo it... He had a big burden; the amount of dialog he had to learn. I don't know how many actors could have coped with it, running a company and getting dialog the day before or even that morning."

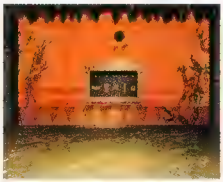
The three-path approach leads to seven different endings, making The Pandora Directive more replayable than any other interactive movie to date. These paths produce different scenes and plot twists, as well as changing character development. Access also added another wrinkle: There are two levels of gameplay. The first is for players who don't particularly like to solve puzzles. There are online hints to get through every tight spot. Level two is for expert gamers; it has extra puzzles, and a little more gameplay.

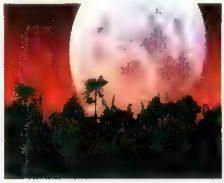
This is truly interactive theater, made more dramatic because it's so unexpected in the gaming media.

The Access virtual-world engine created for Under A Killing Moon was refined and advanced to provide full freedom of movement to the player. It's good to look at, yet feels natural. And the story created by Aaron Conners, who also wrote Under A Killing Moon, is excellent. The Roswell UFO encounter is explored in satisfying detail, and the mystery of the Mayans is suitably impressive. These macro-devices are background to first-class sleuthing, as Tex tries to pull out the facts of the case. The music keeps up the standard; in addition to the score, there's an original song by Richie Havens that's so good it will probably be released as a single. Nicole Tindall also has a song that fits in like it was made for the story.

Access plans to release The Pandora Directive on Aug. 1. I'm putting a red mark on my calendar in anticipation of that day.

-Joyce Worley





▲ **The artistic style relies heavily on realistic shading, shadowing and coloring to give the Pandora Directive's visuals warmth and flavor appropriate to scenes in New Mexico and South America. Note the detail in the surfaces of the room and the omnipresent moon; a Tex Murphy interactive movie has never looked so good.**

http://www.accesssoftware.com/

Chris Jones - The Man In The Trench Coat

The tall lanky westerner looks more like a cowpoke than an executive. His words tumble out in a torrent, as if his mind produces new thoughts quicker than he can say them. Chris Jones, executive vice president of Access since its formation in 1982, got his degree in finance and marketing, but always wanted to be a filmmaker. Perhaps that's the reason he created the first Tex Murphy game, Mean Streets. Since then, he donned the trench coat for Martian Memorandum, and again for Under A Killing Moon.

The Pandora Directive is the fourth Tex Murphy program. The production crew decided to cross boundaries no game had approached until now. Chris believes that the thing that makes movies interesting is the character relationships and how much the viewer can empathize with them. "What really sets this program apart from anything we've done or anything I've seen," Chris explained, "is the ability to get inside the character emotionally, and to be able to follow your feelings, whether you want to play as a hard case or a little softer."

He explained the paths that determine the character of Tex Murphy, "If you want to stay on what we call the high road, that would be Mission Street. If you treat people better than Tex normally would, show a little more respect to the people you run into, there are opportunities for objects in the game. For instance you might find a letter that has cash in it. Do you decide to take the cash, or stick it back in the mailbox? It might mean that you'll run out of money faster than you'd like. But if you stick with the high path, your character is a much more noble person and the endings that you get, and the relationships that develop, including those with Chelsea (the girl Tex is interested in) will pay off."

But Tex's destiny is definitely in the hands of the player. "There are a number of places, probably 12 to 15, where you make choices that affect the outcome of the game. If you find yourself deviating from the high road, you may find yourself on the Boulevard of Broken Dreams; you define yourself as a cynical and opportunistic person. If you keep the money, or threaten to beat a guy up or push someone a little further down, you'll find yourself on the low road," cautioned Chris. "If you treat somebody bad, you're going to lose Chelsea. This is a very wracking moment for Tex and you're going to have to go through it."

It's a big game, filling six CDs. Chris explained why: "We wanted to have even more gameplay than we had in Under A Killing Moon. It's probably twice as big from a playability standpoint. The movie scenes deviate and break off in accordance to choices made by the gamer. That requires much more content; the scenes may be played differently on each path, so we needed a lot more memory."

"It was very important to me to do everything we could to raise the standard up. In my mind, the only others who have done that is the Wing Commander series. From everything I've seen, we've both taken it very seriously. The medium itself is going to see great strides because we've done this."

▶ The differences aren't as apparent in photographs as they are in moving game screens, but NBA Shoot Out's polygonal players and reflective court surfaces truly shine.

NBA Shoot Out

Sony takes on the courts in 32-Bit style, setting up another sweep for the new sports juggernaut

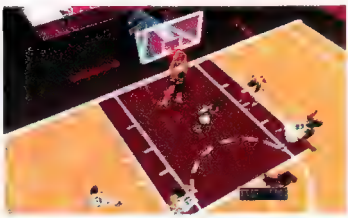
Publisher: Sony
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Sony Europe
Release: May 1996

It is hard to imagine what 32-Bit sports gaming would be like without Sony. Certainly, no one would have thought even half-a-year ago that they would have great 32-Bit football, hockey and (yes) basketball games on the market. From most observers' perspectives, this was not supposed to happen. Sports games are among the hardest to develop—a task rarely accomplished by new software companies getting their feet wet in the genre, let alone on a new hardware platform. Cynics can easily add this accomplishment to the long list of overwhelming feats that Sony has tackled while undertaking the launch of the PlayStation.

Imagine a virtual arena completely comprised of texture-mapped polygons. Shiny, reflective, hardwood floors, endless rows of stands and dasher-boards on the sidelines are all part of the scenery in an attempt to create a fully three-dimensional arena. The basketball players fit right into the scene as they are not sprite-based characters, but also are comprised of polygons, just like their environment. Although the polygons do cause the players to have their rough edges, overly angular joints and surfaces, most actually resemble the players which they seek to emulate. Rodman looks true to form, although only sporting a conservative, single-colored, white hairdo to complement his Chicago Bulls garb, while Shawn Bradley is one of the tallest and thinnest players on the court. In addition to realistic players, the jerseys are very much true to life, including correct player numbers, color schemes and patterns. The true 3-D environment allows you seven different user-selectable camera angles from which to view the action.

▲ Whether the camera is close in or zoomed out, the players are appropriately detailed, fluid in motion and looking surprisingly like their real-life counterparts. Replays spotlight the hottest moments on the court, including spectacular dunks.

▶ Seven user-selectable camera angles allow the player to define a favorite view. Everything moves in true 3-D perspective instead of flat scrolling.



NBA players, such as Golden State's Latrell Sprewell, were wired up to help re-create shots and slam dunks.

But the aesthetics of the players only comprise half of the graphical equation. NBA Shoot Out's eye-popping, three-dimensional characters may look great, but perhaps even more impressive is how realistically they animate. As a result of using motion-capture techniques used in the development process, the players generated by the PlayStation move much like their real-life counterparts. And so they should, as recognizable NBA players, such as Golden State's Latrell Sprewell, were wired up to help re-create and simulate shooting motions, on-court movements and an impressive array of slam dunks. These basket-stuffers are truly a sight to behold, ranging from the mild variety to the flashy, fluid jams that make the highlight reels on *SportsCenter*.

The sounds of Shoot Out aren't quite as fantastic as the graphics, but they certainly shouldn't be knocked. The Golden State connection continues as the in-game commentary is provided by NBA PA announcer Dick Calahan. Although the calls aren't as wild or colorful as NBA Jam or Slam 'N Jam, they do contribute to the atmosphere. Players' names (and nicknames) are rattled out in true NBA PA fashion during replays of slam dunks. Brief quips such as "that was awesome!" or "threee!" are also sounded after choice

The Bottom Line

The long-standing belief that Sony sometimes delivers the best sports games may soon be nothing more than a myth. With Sony continually producing sports games with superior gameplay and graphics such as the highly acclaimed NFL GameDay and the equally impressive NHL Hockey, NBA Shoot Out is right on target to keep the winning streak alive. It appears that Sony must once again prove that they are up to the task of establishing themselves as the premier machine for sports gaming.

shots. Even more impressive are the echoing sounds that make up the feeling of being in an arena. The applause and crystal-clear chants of "de-fense!" from the crowd are excellent, as are the popular organ tunes played periodically throughout the game.

Perhaps even harder than producing excellent graphics and sound in sports games is striking a working balance between realism and entertaining gameplay—something that Sony has appeared to succeed in doing. This 5-on-5 basketball game is not a back-and-forth, run-and-gun, rim-rocking, score-fest as so many others before it. NBA Shoot Out is a great simulation of the game, while still remaining fun to play. There's a large number of defensive skills to learn, and an even higher number of offensive skills.

◀ Everything is presented with a confident flair which raises two important questions: First, how did Sony come to master the art of 32-Bit sports gameplay when their 16-Bit titles rarely elicited praise. Second, what can stop a company with nearly limitless money to spend on player and team licenses?

your offensive player to drive to the basket. Depending on the position of the player when the "drive" button is pressed, a lay-up, dunk or post-up move is executed. If your offensive player is in a poor position when the "drive" button is used, an offensive charging foul may be called or the ball may be stripped away. If you drive at the right time, your player may jam home a windmill dunk while

NBA Shoot Out is an outstanding simulation of the game, while still remaining fun to play.

Certainly, there is no shortage of offensive controls during play, as NBA Shoot Out makes use of the extensive quantity of buttons available on the PlayStation controller. Two types of shooting are available, consisting of the traditional jump-shoot button and an interesting "drive" button that commands knocking over players and drawing a foul in the process.

The passing system is an intricate one, allowing two types of passing. The slow-pass button is the type of pass used in half-court offenses and casual passes, while the fast-pass button is a higher-risk pass useful in the fast break and in situations where there is little time left on the shot or game clock. Passes can also be executed during the middle of a drive or jump shot to kick the ball out to an open man. Other offensive controls include in-game playcalling which allows you to choose from several offensive sets such as an "inside triangle," "box," or "hi-lo post," and an all-important "turbo" button which gives the player a short burst of speed.

▲ Traditional side-scrolling and 3/4 perspective views are available, along with television-style timers, point talleys and spotlighted player photos.

Although defense plays a huge part in this game, the controls aren't nearly as involving. The standard array of fundamental defensive controls are available such as blocking and stealing, but there aren't the new twists that the offensive side of the ball offers Defensive playcalling is available, but unfortunately the playbook is a bit anemic. Only two defensive plays exist, consisting of a full and half court press. There is also the option of double-teaming, which is a popular defensive technique in the NBA.

A variety of game and difficulty options are offered in NBA Shoot Out that should satisfy both casual sports fans and hard-core sports gamers alike. This title offers several modes of play ranging from an arcade mode, which ignores substitutions and other in-depth intricacies, to a simulation mode which brings many more coaching aspects into the game. There are also several difficulty settings to help ease newcomers into battle and to make it harder for veteran players. Game options consist of the choice of instant playoffs, which skips what many consider "the arduous preseason," and a full season option which allows you to run the regular-season gauntlet. It should be noted that season statistics are not tracked, leaving a minor blemish on this feature. Freely trading players between teams is also allowed, effectively allowing you to build your own All-Star team. Perhaps the most surprising option is that Shoot Out allows up to eight human players simultaneously through the use of a special multitap connector.

With so many sports games appearing to be only minor upgrades over their 16-Bit counterparts thus far, NBA Shoot Out ushers in a new era: The next-generation of 32-Bit sports gaming has arrived. Who would have guessed that Sony would be one of the companies leading the charge?

- Kraig Kujawa

http://www.sepc.sony.com/SCEA/index.html

Pennant Race delivered in 3-D

Sony is poised and ready to complete the final piece of their much-anticipated first generation of major-league games in late May with the release of a new baseball game entitled "MLBPA Pennant Race." Like NBA Shoot Out, Pennant Race will utilize motion-capture technology to animate 3-D players made up of texture-mapped polygons helping to bring sports games to a new level of realism. The game will include all essential sports licenses.

▶ Quickly ushering in a new generation of sports sims, Sony is banking on 3-D animation as the catalyst to put their sports sims in the lead.

GRAPHICS: A

+ An outstanding, immersive, basketball environment like no other.
+ Texture-mapped, motion-capture players set a new standard for sports games to come.
+ Outstanding full-motion-video quality.

SOUNDS: A-

+ Though nothing revolutionary, the great sounds and music in this game effectively simulate an NBA arena.
+ The full plate of commentary adds a nice touch to the game.

GAMEPLAY: A

+ A realistic, entertaining basketball game.
- Stealing the ball on defense is a bit too easy.

LASTING POWER: A

+ Great sports games such as Shoot Out always have a long replay life. The 8-player option adds an exclamation point.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "HIGHLY RECOMMENDED"

Some of VR Soccer's best features are the many camera angles selectable in the game. This one, for example, is more cinematic than practical..

VR Soccer '96

VR Sports' debut title looks good but finds it tough to compete with EA and Konami

Publisher: VR Sports
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Gremlin Interactive
Release: Second Quarter '96

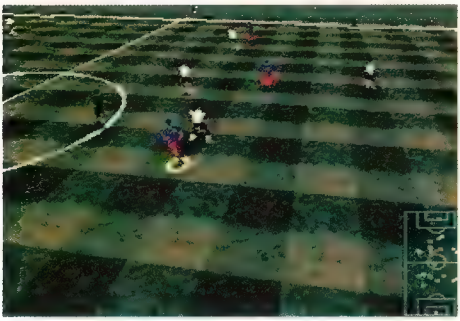
VR Soccer '96, the first sports game from Interplay's newly formed VR Sports division, is the third soccer game to appear in North America for the PlayStation. Plenty more are coming. Keeping that in mind, each new soccer game could somehow distinguish itself from the rest by either offering something new in terms of how the sport is presented or by offering a "more complete" soccer package. Unfortunately, VR Soccer '96 can't deliver on the latter, so it tries to distinguish itself by offering a virtually unlimited number of camera angles thanks to VR Sports' Virtual FieldVision™ technology.

The camera technology in VR Soccer '96 actually helps the game rather than cheapening it, which is a pleasant feature to see in 32-Bit sports software. You can either choose the "wire" camera (which continuously changes on the fly) or switch between any of the preset camera angles during the game. In addition to this, you can rotate any of the preset cameras through 360 degrees.

VRS' graphics are very detailed, and there are no polygon clipping errors when the screen is busy.

GOOOOAAAALLLL!!!! Well, the announcer never gets THAT excited during the game...

Unfortunately, the rest of VR Soccer '96 is not as impressive as its camera technology.



Unfortunately, you need to be running directly for the goal for your shot to even stand a chance, which is one of the many control flaws in this game.

Unfortunately, the rest of VR Soccer '96 is not as impressive as its camera technology. The most important part of any game is the gameplay, and especially when compared to FIFA and Goal Storm, VR Soccer '96 is quite mediocre in this category. Even though the control is very responsive and quick, it is very limited in comparison to other soccer games: You have limited abilities to pass, shoot, run and switch players on offense. One of the most disappointing facets of the control is the fact that you can't put any curve on the ball like other soccer games, nor can you control your heading of the ball (it seems to happen automatically) or do a bicycle kick.

A highly annoying element of VR Soccer's gameplay is the lack of computer-aided assistance when you shoot the ball. In other soccer games, you can run down the right side of the field, and even though you're not facing the goal precisely, the computer understands that you want to shoot for a goal. Conventional digital control doesn't allow you to easily run and aim the ball at the same time, and most soccer titles take this into account. In VR Soccer '96, you'll just have lots of wide shots missing the goal entirely. Speaking of annoying, 15-second pre-match load times don't help anything, and your computer opponent often kicks the ball out of bounds just would a new player would learning the controls

Realism is an important part of any sports game, but VR Soccer '96 can be quite inconsistent in this

The Bottom Line

VR Soccer '96 is the most disappointing title to be released in North America for the 32-Bit soccer genre so far. While the game does a good job of providing British TV-style coverage, the game doesn't offer the excitement of Goal Storm or FIFA and the gameplay brings this game down more. Limited AI and imprecise controls restrict the realism and fairness of play at times.

respect at times. Goal kicks can take an awfully high bounce (beach ball soccer, anyone?) if no one gets to them. The computer also has some kind of superhuman ability to pass the ball the whole length of the field using only headers. VR Soccer calls an inadequate number of fouls, and when they are called, you'll be shocked by the number of red cards. On the plus side, the soccer ball realistically bounces off the player's bodies, and having the referee on the field is a nice touch.

VR Soccer '96 benefits from the availability of many options: There are multiple play modes, and you can choose from practice, friendly (exhibition), league play or world cup play. There are a total of 44 countries to choose from and each team wears a national uniform. You also have the option to change the wind speed, whether or not you want offsides or free kicks on, and more

The animation in this game is very realistic, as it seems that Gremlin has pulled out all the stops in getting motion-capture data from real players

As an international game, VR Soccer makes sure that most of the world's countries are represented, each with its own uniform.

Like other soccer games, you can change your team strategy and formation, and you can also make substitutions in the game depending on whether you're in the arcade or simulation mode. By far, the most original aspect of the options in VR Soccer '96 is the ability to pick your referee. Each referee (with one from each country represented) is rated on vision and discipline. You also have the option to pick a ref at random.

The graphics in VR Soccer '96 are pretty good. Camera movements are impressive, the characters are realistically texture-mapped with their national uniforms and numbers on their backs, and the variety of playing surfaces are all realistic. You won't find any polygon breakup in this game either.

Following in the footsteps of the gameplay, the sound of VR Soccer '96 is inconsistent. Crowd noise is repetitive and sounds muddy; fortunately, you have the option to turn down the volume of any of four types of individual sounds (including crowd noise). Realistic action effects seem almost virtually non-existent in this game, as well: Where are the sliding and kicking sounds?

Realism is an important part of any sports game, but VR Soccer '96 can be quite inconsistent in this respect at times.

A British announcer attempts to make up for the other lackluster audio, but he's only moderately successful—he has an amazing repertoire of speech, but he fails to bring up the excitement level. His running commentary is almost play-by-play, as he comments on almost every shot or pass or announces the name of the player the ball was passed to. While he has tons of speech (which uniquely doesn't get tiring) the game sorely needs some excitement; the game seems quite boring without any in-game music.

Hey, where's everyone going? I told you that the AI needed some work...

Overall, VR Soccer '96 does have its redeeming qualities (British-style TV coverage with the announcer and camera angles), but the game falls way short of both FIFA and Goal Storm in various categories. The lack of excitement, over-simplified controls and weird AI keep this game well below both the standards set by Goal Storm and FIFA.

- Scott McCall

http://www.interplay.com

The Face of Future Soccer in Japan

Human and Tecmo's arcade Grand Striker 2 boasts what the companies deem a "Super Natural Control Feeling," complete with an auto pass button smooth updating and high- speed movement.

Considering the state of arcade technology, though, the graphics could really use a bit of work.

Taito's newest arcade soccer title, Super Football Champ (above), combines large detailed polygon players and a detailed realtime rendered stadium with a few new gameplay innovations. One of eight "ace players" can be chosen to lead any of 30 international teams, giving each team your choice of specialized characteristics. SFC utilizes the company's nearly Sega Model 2-quality FX-1 arcade board

The best looking of the upcoming bunch, somewhat surprisingly, is Sega's upcoming Victory Goal (V-Goal) '96 (above) for the Saturn. Large, detailed character graphics animate beautifully in Sega's proven arcade-style play environment, which closely resembles last year's American Saturn release Worldwide Soccer

GRAPHICS: B+
- \+ Realistic motion-captured animation.
- \+ Tons of usable camera angles.
- \+ Players look like their counterparts with no polygon breakup.

SOUNDS: B-
- +/- Unexciting British announcer is clear and has plenty of phrases.
- \- The crowd noise is uninspired and repetitive.
- \- Where's the music?

GAMEPLAY: C-
- \+ At least the guys move fast in the 3-D environment...
- \- AI is poor and control lacks computer-aided assistance, moves.

LASTING POWER: B-
- \+ You can play in a league or world cup tournament...
- \- That is, if you actually want to play it that much.

OVERALL:

Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE"

▼ There are many characters to interact with in Ripper...or so the designers would have you think. Unfortunately, conversation with other characters is sadly limited, as they are merely a way to present prerecorded snippets of information.

Ripper

Take 2 brings a classic story of horror into the future with lots of FMV

Publisher: Take 2
Platform: 6 CD-ROMs
Format: PC
Developer: Take 2
Release: Now

Another New York City November morning brings journalist Jake Quinlan the news that a would-be Jack the Ripper has struck for the third time. Quinlan writes circulation-building stories about the grisly crimes for the *Virtual Herald*, but the taunting letters he gets from the murderer compel him to hunt the killer. When the fiend attacks and brutally assaults Jake's assistant/girlfriend, his investigation shifts into overdrive.

The newshound roams the urban decay of 2040, scanning clues with his hand-held computer and grilling everyone he meets for useful information. Finally, the amateur detective confronts all four major suspects and must identify the Ripper.

The technical excellence of the full-screen visuals is impressive. Contentwise, Director Phil Parnet does a fine job with action scenes, like the murder that opens the adventure, but there are too many interludes with nothing but talking heads.

Blue Oyster Cult's music fits the dark visuals like two pieces of one of Ripper's puzzles. The retro score is an unusual choice for a futuristic adventure, but it works.

A simpler interface would be hard to find. Flexibility is a partial casualty of this streamlining, since the intelligent cursor and icon strip can't handle subtle movement and object manipulation. Fortunately, most locations have plenty of objects to study and people to meet despite the non-interactive walking and turning.

Abstract movement is a two-edged sword. It lacks the convincing detail of hailing a cab and wending through crowded streets, but it's also a lot less boring and trivial. Ripper has plenty of plot complications and intriguing characters that simulate the essence of this hard-boiled detective story without bogging down in dull activities.

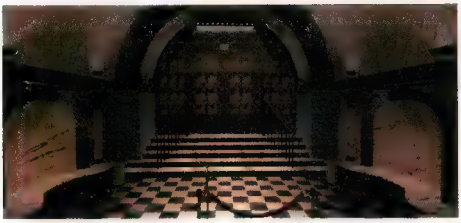
The conversation system is a clever sham. Despite appearances, it's just one long speech. The program lets the gamer decide when to run each section of the speech, but that's where the interactivity ends.

Puzzles, a big part of the game, occur in both real and virtual space. Each solution provides clues needed to solve the Ripper murders.

Cyberspace combat adds further variety. The player must eliminate the defenders in a point-and-shoot target game before entering a previously obtained password to gain access to the information source.

Ripper's audiovisuals are the main attraction, though the puzzles deliver a full portion of mind-stretching fun. Ripper is a step forward in the genre pioneered in CD-ROM by Myst, but it is still not the ultimate interactive movie.

– Arnie Katz



▲ Like others in the "interactive movie" genre, Ripper features highly detailed prerendered scenery, at the cost of true interactivity with the environment.

Ripper is a step forward in the genre pioneered by Myst, but it is still not the ultimate interactive movie.

▲ Rendered imagery combines with digitized video actors to create a dark urban ambience for the future.

GRAPHICS: A-
+ Images are nearly theatrical in quality.
+ Realistic presentation pumps life into the puzzles.

SOUNDS: B
+ Effective use of Blue Oyster Cult music.
- Speeches are too long, and are occasionally stilted.

GAMEPLAY: B
+ The interface is natural and intuitive
- Movement is restricted and simplified too much.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Puzzles are challenging at the toughest level.
- The Ripper's identity switches among four characters.

OVERALL: B

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

http://www.westc com/~taketwo

You'll get to ride granny chairs down staircases and take pot shots at squealing pigs... could you really ask for more?

Earthworm Jim 2

Playmates refines Shiny's famed worm as a lure for action-hungry Saturn owners

Publisher: Playmates
Platform: Sega Saturn
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Screaming Pink
Release: Second Quarter '96

http://www.playmatestoys.com/piehome.htm

Make no mistake—the Saturn version of EWJ2 looks very similar to its 16-Bit predecessors, but it is my sincere hope that no one will take this as an outright condemnation.

For one thing, the graphics on the 16-Bit Jims were some of the best ever seen on the SNES or Genesis. Second, Screaming Pink has improved the overall look of the game: Jim's goofy persona and the frantic on-screen happenings are well animated, and the backgrounds showcase impressive graphic effects that would be very hard to do on the old systems. It is my theory that Screaming Pink improved the looks of the game as far as the level layout and gameplay mechanics of the 16-Bit original allowed it.

There is also a question of technical achievement vs. artistic quality. Improving on the look of a game that is often considered to be the best-looking hand-drawn platformer is not an easy task, and rendering everything in sight does not necessarily make for a better-looking game—unless you absolutely, positively need that "next-generation look" in every single game, the graphics in Jim2 will do just fine. It's not that EWJ2 doesn't have rendered graphics, mind you...they just aren't the kind that make your eyes pop out.

Vivid colors in the far backgrounds contrast with dark, heavily shadowed foreground artwork and defined character sprites.

This particular incarnation of EWJ2 boasts an all-new soundtrack composed by Tommy Tallarico, and though it's good music, I won't be taping it and playing it in the car. The sound effects are what you would expect from a CD-ROM platformer—you take them for granted and they're adequate.

EWJ2 combines rendered artwork with the distinctive hand-drawn style pioneered by Shiny in Earthworm Jim.

The whole point of the game is to solve puzzles and find patterns while trying to stay alive. It is true that the same can be said of any platform game, but this quality is very pronounced in EWJ2, more so than in all other platformers that I've played.

A significant part of the game's appeal is its outlandish sense of humor. Face it, there aren't too many video games that try to be funny and even less that actually are. Fortunately, Shiny's Alice-in-Wonderland style combines pop culture puns (Lorenzen's Soil, The Villi People) with truly bizarre on-screen happenings, such as deadly old ladies and crushing Sumo wrestlers, creating a sense of absurdity that is both entertaining and far from becoming stale.

You know a quality game engine when you see one, and EWJ2 is hard to top.

Very often there is only one way of beating a boss or clearing a particular area, with the main challenge being to find this particular sequence. In EWJ2's designers' favor, these sequences are original, at least visually so. While often less than intuitive and hard to figure out, they're a far cry from the usual "duck the high fireball, jump the low fireball, shoot, repeat" routine that has effectively immunized many a player against platform games. My preferences lie toward platform games that are more exploration-oriented, but you know a quality game engine when you see one and EWJ2 is hard to top in this category.

My only real complaint about Jim 2: The decision to go with a cumbersome password save is a mystery to me when the Saturn has built-in RAM for that purpose, but the fact that my concern is this trivial should say a great deal about the quality of this game.

— *Serger Aish*

GRAPHICS: B+
+ A definite improvement over the 16-Bit versions.
- Lacks the "wow factor" of games like Skeleton Warriors.

SOUNDS: A-
+ A quality soundtrack by Tommy Tallarico.
+ More than adequate sound effects.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ A variety of challenges to overcome and puzzles to solve.
- The gameplay is heavily pattern-oriented.

LASTING POWER: A-
+ The difficulty is well above average.
+ Bizarre humor adds to the replay value.
- Might not offer enough innovation and challenge to seasoned EWJ players.

OVERALL: B+

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

▶ Prepare to meet this sallow lad moments after he dines on one of your former crew members (notice the blood on the mouth). The scene in which this zombie is revealed is one of the more chilling ones.

Resident Evil

Capcom mutates Infogrames' aged 3-D action series for the PlayStation

Publisher: Capcom
Platform: PlayStation
Format: 1 CD-ROM
Developer: Capcom
Release: April 1996

▼ Still background art lacks the dynamic motion of Loaded and Fade to Black, leaving Resident Evil as a simple Alone In The Dark update.

http://www.capcoment.com/he resevil/res.htm

There are two truly frightening things about Capcom's first 3-D action game, Resident Evil. Most people will immediately notice the first: Creepy scenes of violence give Resident Evil a very unique slant on the 3-D action-adventure category. Unfortunately, the truly bone-chilling part of the game is how much it reveals–as Mortal Kombat did–some players' willingness to accept an outmoded design concept when it's coupled with a copious amount of gore and an interesting story. Admittedly, I loved the ambience and blood effects and wanted to see the end of the story, but I didn't really want to keep playing once I was roughly halfway through the game. "Oh, great," I remember thinking, "they've just repopulated the once-empty mansion with more vicious monsters."

Resident Evil is Capcom's tribute to Alone In The Dark, refined with better character graphics and a slightly more friendly interface.

Make no mistake: Resident Evil is Capcom's tribute to Alone in the Dark, refined with better character graphics and a slightly more friendly interface–the only real changes are a moderately increased emphasis on gun action and much-improved character art. Like Infogrames' aging action/horror/mystery series, Resident Evil combines polygonal characters with lifeless one-screen pre-rendered backgrounds. When you walk from left to right down a hallway, rather than scrolling in true 3-D perspective, the CD-ROM will quickly load another flat picture of your current location for you to walk through. The only things that move in the game are characters, which range from zombies to snakes to mutated trees and members of your military attack team, and infrequently appearing objects which you'll need to push aside in order to gain access to a hidden doorway, wall safe or special item.

▲ There's no shortage of blood-spattering violence in this game. The huge cranial explosions are really quite painful for the zombies.

Characters are impressively detailed, animated realistically and look great overall. Rendered backgrounds look like flat screenshots from some of the less eye-catching rooms in the Seventh Guest, and their lack of dynamic animation is the single most disappointing thing in the game–Delphine's Fade to Black is a more "next-generation" gaming experience by comparison. Music is sparse but spooky, sound effects are few in number but appropriate, and the character voice acting is reasonable.

Resident Evil is interesting but not innovative. Depending on which of the characters you choose to use, you start with the relatively weak knife and/or pistol and work your way up to shotguns and bazookas, all of which are used to lay waste to hordes of creatures which die with realistic splashes of blood or muck. When you're not slaying a huge serpent or gunning down vicious dogs, you'll be hunting using a variety of simple items strewn throughout a mansion and its grounds

Capcom used to be known as an innovator of gameplay, which really gave me hope that Resident Evil would be more than just an Alone clone, but everything here has been done before; and years ago at that. You might enjoy the game for what it is; knowing Capcom, I couldn't help but think of how they could have made the knife and gunplay more than just button pressing had they tried.

– Jer Horwitz

GRAPHICS: B
+ Great-looking characters.
+/- Flat but detailed backgrounds.

SOUNDS: B
- Sparse effects...
+ ...but appropriate and good quality.

GAMEPLAY: B–
- Walk, draw gun, shoot, search, repeat.
+ Later puzzles require a bit of thought.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Multiple difficulty levels via choice of characters.
+/- Long quests with little replay value.

OVERALL: B

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED"

X-Men
Children of the Atom

Capcom brings home another fighter with minimal loss

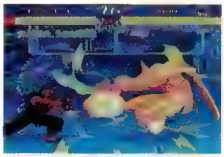
Publisher: Acclaim
Format: Saturn CD-ROM
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

Capcom's latest games have seemed to fare better in Japan than here, as players here are often more fascinated by gore and huge combos than by the subtleties of a well-designed game. X-Men: Children of the Atom appears to be a deliberate attempt to appeal to the American player.

The characters in X-Men are very nicely animated; the original arcade game used ~300 megabits of ROM, and Capcom's programmers have done an excellent job of cramming nearly everything into the Saturn's RAM. Loading times are on the long side, but tolerable, and you can minimize loading by using one character

Sound is also identical to the original, with music played from

◀ Juggernaut is slow, but can really dish out the damage. Without using a boring pattern, he's very hard to beat...



▲ In typical Capcom tradition, Akuma shows up as a hidden character in X-Men as well...

CD and sound effects played from the sound chip. The music is adequate, but it's nothing special.

How close is the Saturn version to the arcade? What is different is very subtle; it almost appears as if the ratio of the size of the characters to the screen is different. Fortunately, unlike the letterboxed SuperNES SF2, this doesn't affect gameplay at all.

The Saturn version also sports a few new features that weren't in the arcade game. Capcom has included a speed select with really slow and fast speeds, and a group battle mode has also been added allowing two teams of characters to brawl it out.

Air blocking, mid-air juggling and overpowered special moves make for a game that plays somewhat "spastically" as you are never quite sure if your move will connect. It really seems like a block-and-attack guessing game. Another problem is character balance: Some characters do have a noticeable advantage.

Still, X-Men is one of the better 2-D fighters out for the next-gen systems. Compared with Night Warriors and SFA, it offers more immediate gratification but lacks somewhat in long-term depth. I'm personally lukewarm about the unpredictables, but it may appeal to you. — *Lee Saito*

GRAPHICS: A
+ A good port of an ambitious game.
+/- Slightly different screen layout.

SOUNDS: B+
+ Once again, arcade perfect.
+/- Original tunes were just Okay.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ The same tried and true SF2 engine at the core...

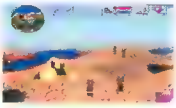
LASTING POWER: A-
+ Computer AI is competent. The Bosses are really tough.

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED" B+

Magic Carpet

Bullfrog unfurls their 3-D PlayStation debut

Publisher: EA
Format: PS CD-ROM
Release: 2nd Quarter '96



▲ On your mission, you will have plenty of opportunities to "carpet bomb" your foes.

Magic Carpet from Bullfrog Software follows in the tracks of Doom and Descent as a nicely done conversion from the PC-CD format.

The concept is pretty basic: As an apprentice to a sorcerer, you assist in trying to revive a world gone bad and you are eventually left to revitalize the planet on your own. With the assistance of your magic carpet, you fly around in a 3-D world recapturing plateaus and islands, claiming homes with a flag and collecting mana.

There are a few small gripes in the translation from PC to PS: Though the flow and frame rate are still solid, Bullfrog changed the engine slightly and the resulting visuals aren't as smooth. Magic Carpet's audio is very nice, but it's nothing incredible—sound effects from the PC version are all there with nothing that stands out, and

▲ Magic Carpet's three-dimensional polygonal cities bring Bullfrog's strategic play up to date.

the Arabian music is pretty standard in quality.

Gameplay is easier than the PC in that you can use the joystick to toggle weapons rather than a keyboard, but this can also be a disadvantage; while you are changing weapons, you have less control over where you are flying. It takes some getting used to.

Is Magic Carpet really fun? There's more strategy here than you'd find in a game such as Doom, but on the other hand there's not as much excitement or fun. There's a level of tedium in Magic Carpet's levels that increases as you progress, despite the fact that you're doing battle in the air, using magic spells and continuously managing multiple problems on the ground. With 50 levels, it's doubtful that you'll be able to go through the entire game in one, two or even 10 sittings, if strategy and 3-D flight are your thing, you've got a lot to play in Bullfrog's latest. — *David Rubin*

GRAPHICS: B
+ Smooth and steady engine.
- PS engine isn't as soft on the eyes as the PC version.

SOUNDS: B
+/- Competent sound effects and audio that aren't amazing.

GAMEPLAY: B-
+/- Responsive control, easy to learn how to use...gameplay isn't as fun as many other 3-D games.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ 50 levels should last anyone for a long time.

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED" B

Worms

A Lemmings-like puzzle game goes military

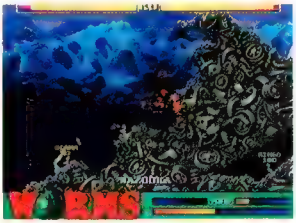
Publisher: Ocean/Team 17
Format: PS/Saturn
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

▲ Basically, the only thing that really looks 32-Bit about Worms are the rendered cinematics between levels.

Having endured an endless parade of Lemmings clones and sequels, it is astonishing that Ocean was able to bring something original to this offbeat genre. Worms places players in command of a small team of four slithery combatants whose only goal is to kill the enemy worms, whereas in Lemmings you might try to save them.

Worms uses a fast-paced, turn-based combat system. Human players are given 60 seconds to maneuver a selected worm, normally to a position with a clear sight of the enemy.

Most of the weapons (bazookas etc.) must be aimed and manually given power to accurately reach their targets. To make matters more complicated, a changing wind has been thrown into the mix, blowing grenades right back into the face of the segmented soldiers who threw them.



▲ Worms borrows Lemmings' screen layout, but the game is much more evil...

Worms is certainly not lacking in replay value: It plays an excellent multiplayer game, allowing up to four players to battle at once. Randomly generated terrain supplies an endless supply of fresh battlegrounds to bloody.

Unfortunately, Worms is hurt by its aesthetics. A commendable job was done on the colorful backgrounds and multiple layers of parallax scrolling, but the same treatment was not given to the stars of the game as the worms are too small and undetailed. The audio is mediocre—little music and no sound besides the explosions of weaponry and screams of worms.

All things considered, though, Worms is one of the few games that merits pardoning its lackluster graphics and sound. The addictive gameplay and excellent blend of action and strategy make Worms a blast to play and a pleasant surprise from Team 17 and Ocean.

– Kraig Kujawa

GRAPHICS: C+
+ Good scaling and scrolling.
- Worms are small, undetailed.

SOUNDS: C+
+ Worms make grunt sounds.
- No music during gameplay and very little sound.

GAMEPLAY: A+
+ Downright addictive.
+ Great multiplayer game.

LASTING POWER: A+
+ Up to four human players and lots of options to customize gameplay.

Intelligent Gamer "RECOMMENDED" B+

Baku Baku

Sega takes their monkeys, dogs, pandas and rabbits for a Saturn spin

Publisher: Sega
Format: Saturn CD-ROM
Release: 2nd Quarter '96

▲ Matching animals with their favorite foods causes heads to swell...

▶ ...and finishing off your opponent brings out a huge animal head, such as this lion's, to chomp away.

Sega's Baku Baku Animal is a Saturn port of a Japanese Titan/ST-V arcade puzzle game. Like most "falling stuff" puzzle games, the graphics are not terribly impressive, instead relying on addictive gameplay to lure people in.

The concept is simple Falling pairs of either food, animals or both descend from the top of the screen. Like most games of its type, you lose when your side of the screen completely fills up with playing pieces. To prevent this from happening, you must match the right animal with the right kind of food; for example, the panda

bears will only eat bamboo. Like Kirby's Avalanche, Baku Baku features a strong offensive element, since making a large amount of pieces disappear from the screen will cause a torrent of pieces to flood your opponent.

Strategically, the game plays very similar to KA, as combos are the backbone of a good offense in both games. The trick now, though, is that you need to have fruit on one side of your "divider" and a matching animal on the other, rather than the simple color matching in KA. This was initially rather disconcerting, but it only took a few minutes for me to readjust my strategy before I was making at least simple combos with no problems.

One result of this matching system is that often you will be waiting what seems like forever for just that one special piece, even more so than KA where you would only be waiting for one particular color. Of course, if you're used to waiting for that one long piece in Tetris, you won't have any problems.

Overall, Baku Baku is a good game, but lacks originality, as most of its gameplay concepts were borrowed from previous puzzlers. Sega's low intended price tag ($30) may be its best saving grace.

– Lee Saito

GRAPHICS: B-
+ Great, bright rendered look.
- Standard puzzle game graphics, nothing eye-popping.

SOUNDS: C+
+ Some voice effects present.
- Music is fairly uninteresting.

GAMEPLAY: B+
+ Fun, offensive puzzle gameplay.
- Nothing too unique here.

LASTING POWER: B+
+ Great party game!
- Derivative gameplay means that you may get tired of this one quickly.

Intelligent Gamer "AVERAGE" B-

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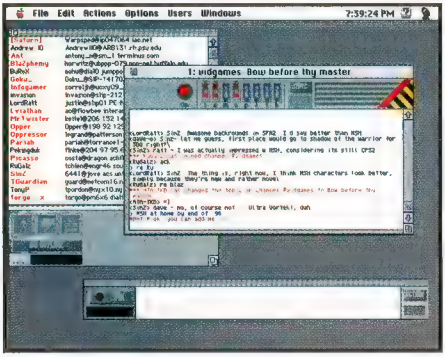
AGF066

IRC and #Vidgames

Talk to gamers around the world from your home PC



Here's what you'll see if you're using a Macintosh equipped with Homer IRC software. A breakdown of the various windows can be found on the next page.

Let's face it: Unless you have a 24-hour job, a deep love for dance clubs or a dedicated romantic interest, you're probably going to have some free time each week when you're alone and bored after work or school. What are your options? Well, if you're reading *IG's FUSION*, you're probably the type who would just fire up some time-consuming game and watch the hours melt away—that's a terrific idea until you're stuck in one of those countless weeks when nothing really exciting has come out (last month, perhaps?) and the local rental shop was left with only 15 copies of T*HQ's Home Alone.

The solution is an acronym: IRC, more formally known as Internet Relay Chat, perhaps the single most revolutionary aspect of the Internet and one that has gone largely untapped. IRC links thousands of computers around the world in realtime, such that Harry Jones in Lincoln, Neb., can be talking live, through his keyboard and over the Internet, with Ryuichi Kinoko in Japan, Wolf Heidelmann in Germany and Munroe Brown in England—all at the same time. Does this sound exciting? It should: Imagine that someone has offered you the chance to hear all about Virtua Fighter 3 as soon as it is shown in Japan, Iron Soldier 3 in Germany, Destruction Derby 2 when it premieres in the United Kingdom, and more. If you haven't used IRC yet, let me break it to you gently...other people have been having these sorts of discussions and getting this sort of information online for years.

There are caveats. You need to be able to speak a common language, so if you only speak the language you're reading right now, you'll have to hope to find a game player in Japan who speaks English. You'll also have to be patient: Unlike a telephone call, discussions are typed with keyboards, so it sometimes takes a minute or so before you'll receive a response to your last question or statement. Last, but not least, you'll need to learn some of the fundamentals of IRC, shown in this convenient little two-page spread, before you can turn on your computer and chat with the world...so let's begin!

Logging in

There are at least three basic ways you can access the Internet, generally: a shell (basic UNIX or VAX) account, a text menu-based account and a graphical (PPP/SLIP/AOL etc.) account. If you're using a shell account, you'll want to try typing IRC in upper or lower case from your main prompt, and if that doesn't work, use the online help system, your provider's manuals or the help phone line to find out how to log in to IRC. Text menu-based accounts should allow you to easily navigate through the online menus to find the IRC option, and graphical Net accounts will often require you to use FTP to locate IRC programs such as mIRC (PC), Homer (Mac) or IRCle (Mac). Once you're running the IRC program, you'll need to choose a nickname for yourself—pick a nine-character word that suits your personality, and if that nickname is already in use, pick something else or try adding an underscore (_) character before or after the characters in your first choice.

Since we're assuming that you're using IRC to chat about games, you can use the commands /join and /leave to explore "channels," which are the IRC's communal chat rooms. Some popular channels for gamers are #vidgames, a hangout for gamers with all sorts of systems, #playstation, #saturn, and those named after specific games such as #doom, #descent, #mk3, #sf2 and #vf2. If you go to a channel and find it empty, try another one... unless you're really patient and are willing to wait until someone else shows up. #Vidgames, though, is almost always full of interesting people, including many of the folks mentioned here.

Simple Commands

Anything you type when using IRC will appear on the screens of other people on your channel, unless you're using a command, which will always be preceded by the / character.

/join #channel — Enter a chat area on IRC

/leave #channel — Leave a chat area on IRC

/nick — Change your nickname

/me [blinks eyes] — Instead of talking, expresses an action

/msg [nickname] xxxxxxx — Instead of talking to the whole channel, will send a private comment (here, it would be xxxxxxx) to the nickname you specify.

/server [noun.server.dom] — Changes your location on the Net

/quit — Leave IRC altogether

IG Editors on IRC

Allen-IG: Allen Sherman,	**CD: Chris Drout,**	**Kraig_: Kraig Kujawski,**
IG Contributing Editor	*IG Associate Editor*	*IG Contributing Editor*
Andrew-IG: Andrew Shaw,	**Dave-IG: Dave Rabin,**	**MikeGNet: Michael Haverty,**
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by Dorling Kindersley
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America's Best Bed & Breakfasts
by Microstar
Detailed information on over 461 Bed & Breakfast Inns in the US, Canada & Puerto Rico.
48612 $15

Kid Phonics
by Davidson & Associates
For ages 4-7. Children will progress from hearing sounds to naturally reading words. Fun and educational.
41901 $34

Muppet Treasure Island
by Activision
An interactive adventure game featuring the lovable Jim Henson Muppets!
49085 $37

Kid Pix Studio
by Broderbund
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49221 $20

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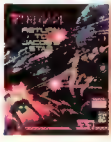

Renegade Return to Jacob's Star
by Mindscape
The Renegade Legion brings you back to take care of some unfinished business.
46347 $25

Loony Labyrinth
by Starplay
Pinball was never so much fun on Windows 95! Expert flipper control, full nudge & tilt, 3 flippers & multiball play
45093 $27

◀ This is the window where you enter text. You can fill up to four lines of text at once, and anything here will appear in the discussion window when you hit the return key.

Beware!

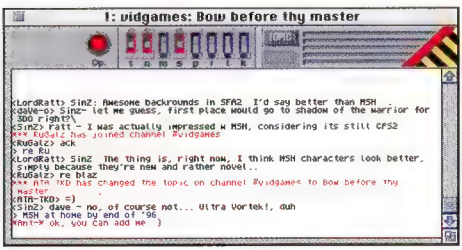
There are a few general rules you should follow when you're using IRC, some of which are little more than common courtesy and others that come from the general heading of "acquired street smarts."

First, keep your use of language in check: A salty pirate's tongue rarely endears you to other people online, so keep your speech clean—at least until you know the guidelines used by your more experienced peers. Additionally bear in mind that you'll often be joining into a conversation already in progress, so be sure to say hello to the group already there and let them know before you leave the channel. Although you can use multiple channels at once, try to stick to using only one until you're experienced enough to handle a couple of simultaneous conversations—learn judicious use of the /join and /leave commands.

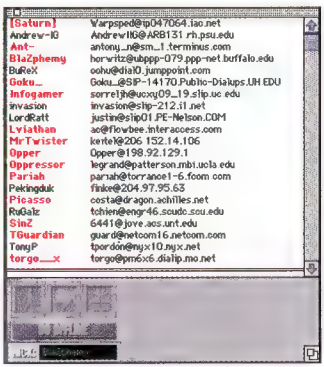
You'll learn from experience that IRC users dislike it when you keep on asking the same question again and again, and you'll find yourself doing this most often when you address your question to a large group rather than restricting it to one person. You might also find that people online will ask you for your password or other sensitive information, which you'll clearly want to keep private. Be cautious when you're using IRC, and don't type commands suggested to you or give out information that you feel uncomfortable with.

Gaming on IRC's #Vidgames

What sort of benefits can gamers obtain from Internet Relay Chat sessions? If you're looking for a heads up on the latest news on game releases and the like, drop into #vidgames—the people there are usually on top of breaking news and are already chatting about recent software releases before they've even arrived at your local stores. Better yet, *Intelligent Gamer* has hosted many live online chat sessions with prominent and interesting people from the games industry, and a schedule of upcoming chat events is normally made available through *IG*'s main Web site (http://igonline.escape.com). You'll get a chance to go one-on-one with developers of your favorite games or talk with the people responsible for making sure the products get onto store shelves and into the pages of game magazines.



▲ This box contains all the discussion that takes place on your channel. Though the text is pretty small here, color differentiates the text typed by you and your channel mates.



▶ The list of users on your channel will appear in a window like this. It's just like an on-screen /whois (see *Simple Commands* sidebar).

Gamers You'll See on #Vidgames

Nickname: Ant-
Nick Origin: Rearranged Initials
Real Name: Antony T. Nguyen
Location: Santa Maria, CA
Page: http://www.rain.org/~antonyn
Fave Game: Yoshi's Island

Nickname: Drknight
Nick Origin: Batman reference
Real Name: Marty Chinn
Location: Sunnyvale, CA
Page: None
Fave Game: Street Fighter 2

Nickname: Infogamer
Nick Origin: Spur of the Moment
Real Name: Nick Sorrell
Location: Norwood, OH
Page: http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/4050
Fave Game: Tekken 2

Nickname: LordRatt
Nick Origin: Takeoff on Last Name
Real Name: Justin Ratcliff
Location: Cupertino, CA
Page: None
Fave Game: Super SF2 Turbo

Nickname: Ranma
Origin: Fan of the Japanese Ranma 1/2 animation series
Real Name: Ben Raphael
Location: Oakland, CA
Page: None
Fave Game: Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers

Nickname: MrTwister
Origin: Company Makes Plastic Worms for Fishing
Real Name: Matthew Skyrm
Location: Allendale, NJ
Page: http://www.internexus.net/~mskyrm
Fave Game: Ridge Racer Revolution

Nickname: RugalZ
Origin: Based on KoF'94 character
Real Name: Andy Chien
Location: Fremont, CA
Page: None
Fave Game: KoF '95

Nickname: [Saturn]
Origin: Loves the Saturn
Real Name: Brandon Mullett
Location: Bethel, OH
Page: None
Fave Game: Coach K College B-Ball

Nickname: SinZ
Origin: Song "Sin" from NIN
Real Name: Kelly Bradley
Location: Dallas, TX
Page: None
Fave Game: Zelda Link/Past

Nickname: Torgo_X
Origin: From "Manos: the Hands of Fate"
Real Name: Mark MacDonald
Location: St. Louis, MO
Page: None
Fave Game: Final Fantasy 5 (JPN)

Nickname: Wu
Origin: From Chinese word for Warrior and War
Real Name: Leif Erikson
Location: Washington, DC
Page: http://dns.worldweb.net/~draculos
Fave Game: Smash TV

Nickname: PaNoMo
Origin: Origin: Favorite Song (from Van Halen)
Real Name: Bob Burne
Location: Canada
Page: None at the moment
Fave Game: Game: Virtua Fighter 2 (Saturn)

Nickname: Kenshiro
Origin: Origin: Hokuto No Ken (Fist of the North Star)
Real Name: Calvin Chan
Location: San Francisco, CA
Page: None at the moment
Fave Game: SSF2T

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IG Queries

Q. I'm curious as to whether Apple's Pippin will break new ground in the video/computer industry.

Antoinette J. Wright
Cincinnati, OH

A. The Pippin's best hope is as a low-cost Internet and multi media terminal, as its graphic abilities and overall performance are unsuitable for any of today's modern gaming applications. Bandai's pricing of their Pippin-based (Atmark) unit—reported to be around $650—makes it seem even less attractive than it could be ($499) considering the price of a Saturn + Modem ($350), and unless the Internet-linking capability is emphasized in large-scale marketing efforts, the Pippin and Atmark will likely go the way of the CD-i.

Q. There has GOT to be some dirt on the exodus of the top Sony execs prior to the PS launch. What happened?

Dutton Kearney
Plano, TX

A. The situation is pretty clear: The executives in question had disagreed with Sony's Japanese brass over the marketing and price point for the PlayStation, with the two main players insisting that the price had to be kept at $299, and the situation came to a head just prior to the PlayStation's North American launch. An earlier battle over marketing had changed the campaign from the Polygon Man focus to the Sofia and the URNOT(e) commercials, all nearer the last minute, which clearly didn't make Sony's Japanese administrators happy. As a result, reassignments were made, people were let go, and Sony went on to take the holiday season with a $299 price tag owed largely to people who've left the company.

Q. Why should gamers wait for the Nintendo 64 after they've been lied to by Nintendo so many times?

Duane Laviniere
Troy, NY

A. Perhaps because you won't be able to play any of Nintendo's excellent first- and second-party games on any other machine, or because many of their third-party titles (including Shadows of the Empire) will be exclusive to the machine... at least, that's the theory of why people would want the machine.

Q. Why are we here? Why do we exist? If there is a God, where did he come from? If there was nothing to start with, where did ANYTHING come from? I've been wondering these questions for a while, and well, maybe you people can help me find the answers. Thank you for helping me solve the problems in my mind.

Joe Andraszek
Yukon, OK

A. Without commenting on the other sorts of "problems in [your] mind," here's a brief answer summary.

[1] and [2]: This universe will cease to exist when some person from the human race perfects a recipe for cat-flavored Jell-O. According to fans of Tempest 2000 and Defender 2000, Jeff Minter, who has long been working on sheep-flavored Jell-O, is as close to either the perfect man or the cataclysm catalyst as man can come.
[3]: Today's God (and politically correct people can't say "he") was another dimension's former animal-rights activist and gelatin manufacturing mogul who, in a stroke of bad luck, was playing classic Atari and Williams arcade games on a hotwired motherboard when a power surge zapped him out of his reality and into omnipotence. [4]: The odd paradox created by the answers to questions one, two and three should make this all very clear to you now. In the meanwhile, you may still have enough time to beat Jeff Minter to the recipe, so get cracking!

◀ Hey, someone call the fashion police, it's Hibiki Dan!

Q. Do you think Hibiki Dan's (Of SFA) pink gi outfit could be a hand-me-down from Ken accidentally washing one of his red gis with one of Ryu's white ones?

Tony Toon
Evansville, IN

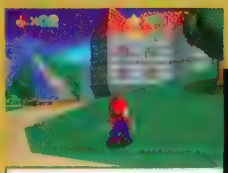
A. Interesting Street Fighter Alpha tidbit: According to Capcom USA, the game's Japanese design team —who lost some of Capcom's SF2 people to SNK, which went on to release Art of Fighting's Ryu and Ken clones Ryo Sakazaki and Robert Garcia—decided to jab back with the Dan character. While Capcom tries to explain Dan's identity with a story about his father poking Sagat's eye out, Dan was designed for one main reason: To humorously mock Ryo and Robert directly with a cheesy pastel outfit, limited special moves and a sort of goofy Garcia-esque ponytail.

Q. What will happen to the PlayStation when the Nintendo 64 comes out? Will it emphasize PC ports, or will EA and Psygnosis have to come up with some killer apps to combat the new system? I hope it does what the Genesis did to the Super Nintendo in the early 1990s.

Paul Elliott
Springfield, MO

A. Sony will continue to develop games internally that will support the PlayStation, including more Psygnosis and Sony Interactive software that will arrive months before any Nintendo 64 versions are released, and they will continue to attract developers based largely on the merits of their lower manufacturing costs for software and the benefits of the CD medium. PC ports will certainly be easy on the PlayStation, but don't count out the potential for solid arcade ports and original software that will appear on multiple platforms, including the PS.

▼ Is it worth buying a 32-Bit game console when 64-Bit games are around the corner? It's your call.



Q. Given the sheer number of systems that are about to come out, do you feel it is wise for the average consumer to purchase one of the current 32-Bit systems knowing full well that 64-Bit is about to hit? I am asked this all the time and while I have my own opinion, I was wondering what you thought.

Ian Keiner
Pasadena, CA

A. The bottom line with any purchase is that there will undoubtedly be something bigger and better in the future, so if you're looking at a game console as making an investment, there's some disappointing news: Game systems and software simply lose financial value as the years go on, so if you're looking not to lose money, invest in stocks rather than the games themselves. Instead of looking at machines in that way, *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* prefers to think about game consoles as devices we buy for the sake of entertainment, and thus we recommend that people should buy hardware that can play the games they want—if that means buying only one system (and, sure, some people did that even when the Genesis and Super NES were under $100 each), choose the one that has the best games, and if you have some extra money, buy another machine. You're not going to see Mario on the Saturn or PlayStation, nor will you see Virtua Fighter 3 on the N64. So when you're asked the question, tell them to ignore the specs and get the machine that has the games they will enjoy the most.

Q. With the big breakup between Square Co. and Nintendo, is there a possibility of Square developing games for Sega's Saturn? I hope my dream finally comes true.

Jeremy Santos
Winnipeg, Manitoba, CANADA

A. Sega is anxious to work with Square, and Square's only limitation on pursuing Saturn development has been that they want to insure that whoever they work with will have fair publishing practices and a reasonable hardware architecture to support their technology. Nothing has been signed yet, but Sega is hopeful.

Q. Concerning the next-generation system wars, what is the most important factor in determining the eventual "winner?"

a) Customer loyalty (re: Nintendo)
b) Financial Backing (re: Sony and Matsushita)
c) Systems' technical power (re: Nintendo^{64})
d) Third-party support (varies from system to system)

Evan Shamoon
New York, NY

A. [A] Isn't necessarily Nintendo's alone; Sega has built a pretty solid following...and [C] isn't Nintendo's alone, either; the M2 is just as powerful as Nintendo's machine, if not more powerful. [B] Is somewhat irrelevant as NEC was once a competitor in the marketplace (remember them?) and all it took was a swift kick in their American pants to send the Japanese giant running out of the marketplace. Those are sort of moot issues, though; most likely, it's D, with B and C as related factors. To succeed today, as Atari and 3DO have both learned, you need people to back your product, and it's easier to get backing if you have good technology and lots of money to spend on marketing. Never underestimate the importance of [E], a low price point: Any system priced at $99 with a reasonable combination of A-D should do pretty well.

Q. I would like to see CD reviews of game music. That would be something a lot of people would love to get their hands on, knowing which game music CDs are worth getting.

Danielle Scott
San Jose, CA

A. Look forward to a Game Music CD guide in an upcoming issue of our magazine. A few quick pointers: The Japanese Viewpoint soundtrack is superb, and the music for many of Sega and Namco's titles is also worth checking out. Beware, however, of Yuzo Koshiro's Early Collection...

Q. Can we please, as a society, limit the use of these phrases:

1. Fully Rendered 3-D Graphics: What, as opposed to those games that are a mix of wire-frames and conceptual sketches?
2. Full-Motion Video (FMV): Totally meaningless term. Also, the bane of interaction.

I think those two things will go a long way toward better games and less marketing-weasel box copy.

Derek Carroll
Chicago, IL

A. You'll find that *IG's FUSION* has spent the last few issues' Buzz Word columns dissecting both of the above phrases in addition to "3-D Sound," terms which we felt obligated to break down and expose in greater detail for the benefit of our readers. As we've tried to show with the Buzz Word pages, such terms can have positive uses, but we want to make sure that people understand what they actually mean before getting sucked into foolish software or hardware purchases. To specifically address your two terms above, there's clearly a difference between rendered artwork (DKC for example) and that mostly drawn by hand (Yoshi's Island). FMV isn't really a meaningless term, but it can be the bane of interaction if it's the dominant component in a game's graphics.

Q. Why can't we get the finished Skeleton Warriors for the Saturn? It's wanted desperately!

Mark Ho
Vista, CA

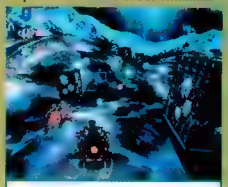
A. The rumor currently swirling around Playmates is that the company opted to add some more versatility to the game's main character in an attempt to give the gameplay a much-needed boost. If this is truly the case, *IG's FUSION* will re-evaluate the grade given to SW in issue eight.

Q. What do you think about the accusations of bias in the game press? And where this industry is headed?

Greg Wittel
Gold River, CA

A. There's no question that many game magazines are biased—you could name the examples as easily as we could—but be aware that there are oftentimes other factors at play in determining the coverage certain games or game systems receive. *Intelligent Gamer's FUSION* has pledged (ever since we were an online magazine) to give companies, game systems and software the fair shake that they deserve, and we think that we've succeeded to a large extent where other magazines have found it difficult to do so. Note that there are at least two extremes for the expression of bias: We find crazed zealotry just as distasteful as outright system slamming, and as you can surely recall from weird movie advertisements (such as when some "critic" would say that "*Congo* is the best film of 1995!") there's nothing quite as sad as finding that you can't trust someone because he/she either loves or hates almost everything, or that the reasons he/she likes something just don't seem to add up when you read his/her review. For our part, we're doing our best to be a fair and impartial source of gaming information, so please let us know what you think.

▼ **Will Skeleton Warriors be improved before release? Hmmm...**



Q. Imagine that the PlayStation was Bob Dole, the Saturn was Pat Buchanan, the M2 was Steve Forbes, and the N64 was Lamar Alexander.

1) Who would you vote for and why? Sample Answer: "I would vote for Bob Dole as president because it would be cool to have a president with a built-in Geometry Engine. Think of the games!"
2) Would anyone even WANT to play with their system again if it were running in the Republican Primary?
3) Did Matsushita buy the presidency for $100 million?
4) Can Pat Buchanan really render 60 frames per second or is it 60 fields per second interlaced, resulting in 30 frames per second?

Be prepared to discuss your answers before a Congressional subcommittee. Enjoy!

Ken Sjoquist
Portland, OR

A. [1] Lamar Alexander, because he'd look even more professional in a plumber's costume than he does in those red flannel shirts. [2] That depends on which machine President Clinton is left with, considering that all of the good ones have been taken by the Republicans already. [3] Anything is better than selling the presidency to Ross Perot. [4] From this vantage point, Pat's problem isn't his ability to render or his frame rate, it's his transparency effect that seems to have slipped him up.

Send your questions to
IG's FUSION Queries,

by e-mail at ***iglee@aol.com,***
subject line: Communications

or
by mail at
1920 Highland Avenue, Suite 222
Lombard, IL 60148

Diamond Dreams

Baseball Sims Start a Golden Age

By Arnie Katz

I managed a baseball team for five seasons. My exploits never make the news, and the St. Louis Aliens aren't listed in Total Baseball. They existed only on the MicroLeague Baseball data disk that stored the eight teams in our computer simulation draft league.

That didn't make my three-time pennant winners less important to me. I cared about their diamond doings as much as I do about my party in a fantasy role-playing game.

The comparison isn't farfetched. Tony LaRussa Baseball 3, Baseball for Windows, Pro League Baseball and MicroLeague Baseball 96 immerse gamers in the experience of managing a major-league club. As in fantasy RPGs, gamers must weld the players' abilities into a winning collective effort. A baseball RPG strings games together into multi-seasonal campaigns with long-range, as well as immediate, challenges.

Despite their strengths, sports RPGs are the stepchild of the baseball and role-playing categories. Statistical baseball sims sell 10 to 25 percent of action baseball programs and less than one-third as well as a typical RPG.

Logistics are a formidable road block. Baseball RPGs are enjoyable solitaire, but only a multiplayer campaign brings out the full richness. An eight-team computer league needs four PCs, preferably at one location. That's a lot of equipment.

Even if a league has the hardware, the simulations fall short. Either the marketing department forces arcade elements into the program, or the design includes statistical illusions like "hot streaks" and "clutch hits."

Consumer skepticism is rampant because electronic gaming has sinned so often against the national pastime in the last 25 years. At first, it was inadequate technology. Baseball for the 2600 was a joke. The fielding team had three players, linked like a chorus line. The controller sent them careening from the outfield wall to home plate in an eye blink.

Frank Thomas' Big Hurt Baseball, while not a simulation in the strictest sense of the word, clearly depicts how far baseball games have come since the Atari VCS.

Home baseball game graphics have even leaped ahead of arcade games for the moment, and their statistical depth in 1996 is unparalleled.

Graphics and playability improved through the eight- and 16-Bit video game eras, but carts emphasized action. The last batch of 16-Bit games, like Ken Griffey Baseball and World Series, use real player names but the statistics are subordinate to the real-time action. Arcade baseball is fun, but it doesn't replicate the major leagues. If the gamer can't time the swing, it doesn't matter if Babe Ruth or Rafael Belliard is at bat. Customer support needs improvement too.

Despite their appeal, no pure statistical sim has a customer base of more than 100,000. Relentless technology is changing that, and soon baseball RPGs may be nearly as popular as the rotisserie leagues that infest every office and campus.

The most significant innovation is real-time online competition. Services like AOL run leagues, but the games take place offline. Cyber-leagues solve crowding at the keyboard and equipment availability. They also remove the geographical restrictions of face-to-face leagues.

This major change comes as the sims themselves jump to the next level. The current games are more accurate than rival tabletop sims, and CD-ROM technology is widening that gap. The unplugged sims have no computer to collate ratings, consult charts and combine factors to generate realistic and varied play-results. The newest games combine this precision with sound and graphics that are a lot more riveting than numbers off little cards and result boards. User-transparent electronic baseball sims let participants focus on play-mechanics and bookkeeping.

Next Year has finally arrived for baseball sim fans. Nationwide cyber-leagues should be in operation before the end of the current season. Once gamers get a taste of this unusual and compelling interactive experience, designated hitters may be nearly as common as dragons in the RPG field.

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Full-MOTION Video

4 3 2 1

By Christopher Drost

FMV Defined

Full-motion video (FMV) is a computer or game console's playback of movie-like sequences, which can be created through the video taping of human actors, frame-by-frame rendering of computer graphics, movement of hand-drawn animation or a combination of any or all of the above. Using different formats of video compression, the images are digitized by a computer and stuffed onto a storage medium of some kind—compact disc technology is the currently preferred format for its ability to store mass quantities of data. "Artifacting" is one result of the compression of video—tiny but noticeable blotches appear for several seconds on the video images, detracting from what would otherwise be clear imagery.

While the compression of movies is typically a very slow process, decompression can be easily done in realtime. Picture quality (number of colors, resolution, etc.) and frame rate of the compressed video vary with the amount of processing power available, how much of the screen the playback window will take up and the type of compression scheme used. Generally speaking, the more powerful the machine you're using, the better video playback will look on your screen.

To make this easier to understand, line up a Sega CD machine, a 32X, a PC and a Saturn. Pop in a game with full-screen FMV into the Sega CD. For this example, let's consider Digital Pictures' Supreme Warrior. While Digital Pictures probably made every attempt to ensure the video would be as clear and impressive as possible, the limited 16-Bit processors in the Genesis and Sega CD force the video clips to become extremely grainy and full of artifacting. The 32-Bit processors of both Sega's 32X and Saturn machines yield more vivid colors and less video artifacting than their 16-Bit cousin; the Saturn's FMV output results in the closest to broadcast-quality images.

The whole picture changes when it comes to the PC, however. Depending on what processor (486, Pentium) you have in your computer and the type of video display card, CD-ROM speed and memory you have available, the full-motion video output can look drastically different from machine to machine. Naturally, the better each component is, the better the FMV will look on screen. Strictly speaking, a Pentium with a double-speed CD-ROM and eight megabytes of RAM should have little problem displaying colorful full-screen video, but more RAM and a faster CD-ROM can increase the video quality even further

The History and Uses of Full-Motion Video

Using FMV in games has long been regarded by some developers as a new tool for video game development, while others have simply used FMV in the pursuit of creating an "interactive movie." While developers have found video sequences to be easy-to-implement eye candy, game reviewers and gamers have slagged those titles which most heavily rely on FMV technology, and FMV even played a part in the U.S. Senate's "Violence in Video Game" hearings back in 1994. That's when the campy B-movie FMV game Night Trap for the Sega CD was denounced by Congressmen, Toys 'R Us and even America's hardest-core game player, Captain Kangaroo.

Game developers utilize FMV in many different ways. Some choose a full-motion video opening for the corporate introduction to a game or use quick FMV cut scenes to emphasize and/or add pizzazz to a particular in-game sequence. Take Sega Sports' NHL All-Star Hockey for the Saturn or just about any Electronic Arts sports title and look at the flashy openings—do you notice the similarities to a televised sporting event?

▶ In these actual scenes from Psygnosis' smash hit Wipeout, the Playstation's built-in JPEG compression keeps the picture quality close to broadcast quality.

Some developers choose to use FMV sequences as background artwork while sprite-based gameplay takes place in the foreground—Novastorm by Psygnosis is one such title—while other companies opt for FMV as transitional elements between certain segments of a game. The video in Off-World Interceptor by Crystal Dynamics is a great example, complete with cheesy actors and an audience comprised of two geeks who've watched far too much *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

There's also a huge library of "Interactive Movie" FMV games, including just about anything from American Laser Games (Drug Wars, Mad Dog McCree), Digital Pictures (Supreme Warrior, Ground Zero, Texas, Sewer Shark, Corpse Killer, Make Your Own Video with Kris Kross or Marky Mark), and Readysoft (Dragon's Lair, Space Ace). Sega tried their hand at interactive movies with Fahrenheit, Tomcat Alley and Wirehead, but left the market for obvious reasons—are any of the aforementioned gamesin any gamer's top 10?

◀ The color quality and speed of video updating is largely determined by the quality of the gaming hardware you purchase.

Video Compression

There are all sorts of different algorithms floating around, all of which effectively manage to squash down the digital video bits (the ones and zeros in binary code) by decreasing the number of bits needed to represent the frames of a moving image. The first to pull it off with a hardware co-processor to great success was the Motion Pictures Expert Group or MPEG.

The imaging industry wanted to set up some kind of uniform standard, and in doing so, created the Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG). Their objective was to determine how still image files could be uniformly compressed and then delivered through some medium (modem, CD-ROM, etc.) and then be restored or uncompressed to full size. It didn't take too long for JPEG to become standardized and the MPEG people suddenly wanted a way of blasting moving pictures over various mediums, based on the JPEG model.

After years of trying to get the concept to work, MPEG-1 was released. According to the technical definitions of JPEG/MPEG, "both systems are based on Discrete Cosine Transform, a mathematical process whereby images are converted from energy-to-time based representation." In other words, with JPEG compression, the least significant bits of information are removed without screwing up the original photo. MPEG, which deals with a stream of 30 individual pictures per second, begins with a single frame and then skips to another four frames away. MPEG compression then determines the motion that took place in between frame #1 and frame #4, based on various elements and their relative motion.

The problem with MPEG, however, is that the mathematical calculations are so complex that a separate "accelerator board" is required just to handle the decompression math in order to make the video look broadcast quality. One popular product of this nature is Sigma's MPEG video board for the PC.

The Duck Corporation of New York managed to come up with a software solution to the MPEG problem, in the form of something called TruMotion. Duck's scheme offers high-quality compression without the need for additional hardware, as well as providing the ability to compress and encode video in real-time and then use the final format on a variety of platforms, including the Saturn, PlayStation, 3DO, AVI and Quicktime formats.

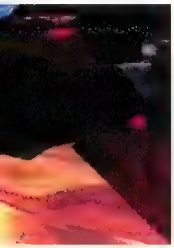
▲ **Full-motion video has become important enough to some companies that teams spend more time on cinema modes than in-game ones.**

Digital Pictures have also invested roughly $2 million on their own proprietary compression scheme. Called DIGICHROME, it allows a typical full-screen frame of digital video to be squashed from 307 Kbytes of information to 16 Kbytes, yielding a 20:1 ratio of compression. Digital Pictures say they have also achieved compression rates in excess of 50:1 in certain circumstances—obviously, higher rates mean more artifacting, fewer colors and grainier quality.

FMV and the Marketplace

Digital Pictures was among the first to pioneer the use of FMV in modern video gaming, and the Sega CD was among the first platforms to be imbibed with this curious new form of gaming. Other companies quickly caught on and drowned the marketplace with full-motion video schlock. Back in late 1993, Sega injected huge dollars into a Hollywood-style production office, facilitating everything needed for an FMV game. You may even remember several deals Sega made with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc. back in early 1994 to develop interactive video games based on movie releases from MGM Pictures and United Artists. That was then, however: Digital Pictures recently laid off a large number of workers and many dedicated FMV film studios are being retooled for other purposes.

FMV may still be a big business in the world of interactive entertainment but, according to Digital Pictures, it's just evolving. In fact, the company says it is shying away from the term "FMV" and is concentrating on whatever it takes to make a great game. They do admit, however, that it also means using a video camera as a creative tool and not as a recording device.

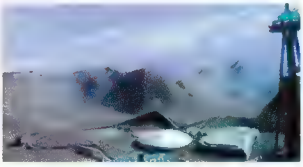


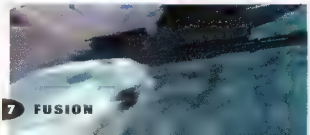
Creating the 99 percent FMV Game

Most games utilizing FMV to create "Interactive Movies" get shoved into the "cool graphics but stinky gameplay" category—in fact, most FMV games are notorious for the lack of true interactivity. I liken many of these games to the Choose Your Own Adventure series of books I read as a kid; the object is simple: Read a page or two and then turn to a new set of pages based on three decisions at the bottom of the page you just read.

The process begins by designing a non-linear script, a story line similar to the Choose Your Own Adventure analogy presented above. Hire a camera crew and some B-grade actors, then go and blow a wad of cash on sets and filming. Then hire someone to edit the video together and find someone who can code and program the whole thing to run, complete with a moderately clumsy interface. Make sure that each finalized video sequence is compressed to the point where the end-product will only take up one or two CD-ROMs and not 50; add some sound, music and a massive marketing budget and voilà, you have your own FMV game.

▼ **Pre-rendered technology (see Intelligent Gamer's Fusion, issue eight) made this level of visual quality possible.**





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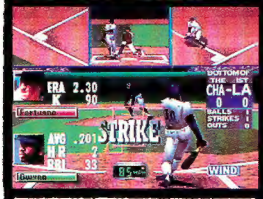

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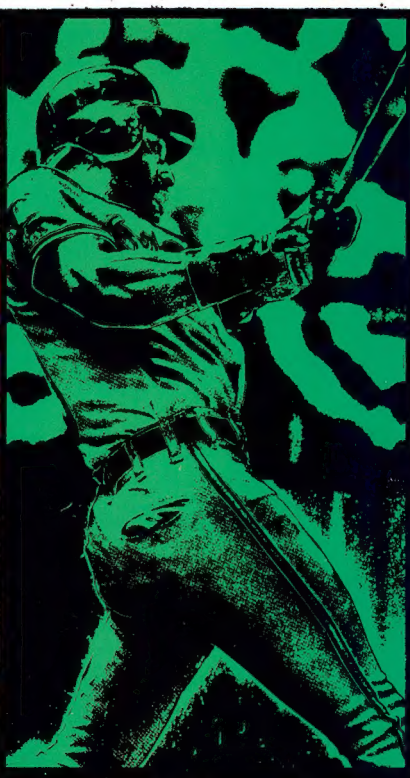

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